

**LAUGHTER AND TEARS  
IN THE  
MOUNTAINS**

By  
**RUSSELL D. LOWTHER**



*LAUGHTER AND TEARS*  
*IN THE*  
*MOUNTAINS*



*By*  
RUSSELL D. LOWTHER

TO NICHOLAS COUNTY PEOPLE

Whose Faith, Love and Friendship  
did so much to make our Ministry possible

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RUSSELL D. LOWTHER

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Author holds degrees of A. B., and B. D., attained at West Virginia Wesleyan College and Garrett Theological Seminary. In addition to the pastorate about which **LAUGHTER AND TEARS IN THE MOUNTAINS** is written, he served as pastor in Huntington, Williamstown, Glen Dale, Bluefield and is currently serving as pastor of First Methodist Church, Sistersville, West Virginia. His student pastorates were at Adrian, W. Va. and at Cherry Valley, Illinois.

Following graduation from seminary in 1944, he became pastor of Westmoreland Methodist Church in Huntington, where he lead the congregation in a building program that resulted in their new church edifice and inspired also a unique district-wide interest and participation in a local project of church extension. Eight years after his pastorate at the Westmoreland church, he returned to the same church for a second five year pastorate and lead the congregation in a program which resulted in their new modern parsonage. — At Glen Dale, he dedicated the new church edifice. — He has received over fifteen hundred members into the church.

He is a York Rite Mason and a Noble of Beni Kedem Shrine in Charleston. His hobbies include oil painting and trailering; he is a member of Wally Byam Caravan Club International. — **LAUGHTER AND TEARS IN THE MOUNTAINS** is written out of appreciation for those who made his ministry possible.



RUSSELL D. LOWTHER





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*To my wife, Catherine, for inestimable help through excellent memory and voluminous scrap books;*

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RUSSELL D. LOWTHER



## P R E F A C E

Four of the most interesting and exciting of my forty years as a minister occurred during my first pastorate, which took place in Nicholas County, West Virginia, 1933-1937, in the vicinity of the Summersville Dam and High Bridge over Gauley River. It is about those four years that I have written. In this writing I have related varied personal experiences and anecdotes which occurred there. There is no fiction in LAUGHTER AND TEARS IN THE MOUNTAINS.

Across the many years that have come and gone since I was appointed, at the age of twenty-one, to serve as pastor of the Earl Charge of The Methodist Church in Nicholas, I have experienced an ever deepening sense of appreciation to the Nicholas County people, whose kindness in accepting and befriending me in countless ways, made possible my ministry. When I remember them, I feel as the Psalmist would possibly say that, "I have seen the goodness of God in the land of the living!" While I cannot hope to adequately express my appreciation, it is my hope that this little volume will serve at least to acknowledge my sense of gratitude.

You will realize that I have made no attempt whatever at being academic in this writing. I have attempted simply by relating many and varied personal experiences in Nicholas to convey an image of a great people whose kindness made possible my ministry. The experiences that I have related are real. The names of people to whom I have made reference are also real, and in many instances refer to persons who are yet living there in Nicholas. A great multitude of stalwart men of the mountains to whom I have made reference, have gone from our sight to "That bourn from which no traveler returns, that house not made with hands. . ." Many of the experiences that I have related are of a most humorous nature and will invoke much laughter; some of the experiences are of a more serious nature and may moisten your eye! But whether humorous or serious, it bears repeating that there is no fiction in LAUGHTER AND TEARS IN THE MOUNTAINS.

RUSSELL D. LOWTHER

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*I.*

*SETTING THE SCENE*



## HOW IT ALL STARTED

In September, 1933, The West Virginia Conference of The Methodist Church met for its Eighty-Seventh Annual Session in Parkersburg, West Virginia. The reading of the appointment of the ministers by the bishop at the closing of the session brought about one of the truly great moments of my life. I had been appointed to serve as pastor of the Earl Charge, which consisted of nine churches in the Buckhannon District of the Conference and located in Nicholas County. I was thrilled beyond words to express! Although thirty-five Annual Conferences have come and gone since that day, I can still recall something of the excitement, appreciation and glorious anticipation of that occasion.

I had waited a long time for that day! At the age of fourteen I had become aware of The Call to the ministry and, after courses of study then required by the conference, I was duly licensed to preach as a local preacher at the age of sixteen years. For five years I had been active in that office, preaching every Sunday and holding revival meetings in one-roomed school houses and assisting the Methodist and United Brethren pastors in various charges. My first Lay Minister's License had been received in the United Brethren Church, and signed by The Rev. F. G. Radabaugh, superintendent, May 7th, 1928. I was raised as Methodist, but my family was living temporarily at Kennedy Station, near Jackson's Mill, in Lewis County at the time and I had been attending the United Brethren Church. At the earliest convenience my credentials were transferred back to the former Methodist Episcopal Church, in which I was raised. This was done at the Buckhannon District Conference, held at First Methodist Church in Buckhannon, June 17, 1931, Dr. L. S. Grose, district superintendent.

However, in the meanwhile I graduated from High School and had explored every possible means of entering college. But this door was closed. In order to have gone to college it was necessary that I receive a student appointment in which I could earn my way. When I finally realized that no student appointment was available, and that there was no other possible help that I could find, I was crushed, which is to say the least. It brought me very

near to the "slough of despond!" In fact, as much as I hate to admit it, I had become slightly bitter. But God works in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform! Soon a right spirit was renewed within my mind and heart.

My district superintendent, the late Dr. L. S. Grose, came to my rescue. He told me of the Earl Charge in Nicholas County that was to be left unsupplied with a pastor that year. He asked if I would be willing to accept the appointment until a student appointment could be made available? It would only be for about a year, he said.

However, my answer to Dr. Grose was in the words of Isaiah in his Temple Experience, recorded in Isaiah 6:8., who, when he heard the voice saying: "Whom shall I send and who will go for us?" replied, "Here am I! Send me!" And so, to make a very long story very, very short, that is how it all started.

### THE MAN FROM NICHOLAS

In a few minutes after the reading of the appointments at the Conference in Parkersburg, at which I had been appointed to the Earl Charge, I was introduced to one of the most unforgettable men whom it has even been my pleasure to know; a man who not only was of help in that hour in answering many questions about Nicholas County and the Earl Charge, but a man whose friendship and help was to play an important role in my life at one of the churches for the next four years. He was the kind of man, who, if you ever met him once, you would never forget him!

The introduction took place in the midst of a jostling, noisy crowd on the street in front of the church. He was introduced to me simply as "A Man From Nicholas," who could tell me about my appointment. I did not at first hear his name, but understood that he was the Lay Member of the Annual Conference from the Earl Charge.

The Man From Nicholas was a man of absolutely no pretense whatever. As the saying is, "he didn't pull any punches!" There



was no "beating about the bush!" He was most sincere and brutally frank about everything, but a man with a most delightful sense of humor and would keep you laughing inspite of everything.

However, when we had drawn away from the crowd where we could talk, a conversation took place that I would give most anything if it could have been recorded on tape that I could now share it with you. I am certain you would get a "charge" out of it. But unfortunately there is no record except in memory and I will share it with you now as nearly as I can remember. This is the way it went: —

"You bet your boots I can tell you about the Earl Charge and Nicholas County. If I don't know about it I don't know who does! Now just what would you like to know about it, young feller?"

"Everything!" I said, "Just everything!"

"Well," the Man From Nicholas continued, "that's a pretty big order. There's a good bit about it, you know! You probably wouldn't believe what I'm a-gon'-ah tell ye' but you've ask fer it and I'm a a-gon'-ah let ye' have it!"

Squaring away, lifting his hand and pointing toward me, he continued:

"You'll be going back and forth between the Wilderness and the Promise Land. You'll be on Mount Nebo and Mount Zion. You'll pass close to Gilgal. You'll get calls from Macedonia! and believe me, son, you'll walk through the deep Vale! But don't you be alarmed at all this, because you'll arrive safely many times at Glad Tidings!"

By this time I was utterly confused and a little irritated to think that this Man From Nicholas should joke with me at what I considered one of the most serious moments of my life. As he stood looking at me, — his sharp eyes almost lost to view under a mass of bushy eyebrows, and twitching his long, "handle-bar,"

mustache, — I felt that he was trying to confuse me and having fun at the expense of my feelings.

"Quit kidding!" I said, "this is a serious matter! The Bishop has appointed me to the Earl Circuit in Nicholas and I want to know where that is and what it is like there!"

"My dear young man," the Man From Nicholas continued, "I'm not 'pulling your leg,' the place where you are going is full of Bible names. The districts of old Nicholas have Bible names; your churches have Bible names; many of your members have Bible names; we got a post office that's got a Bible name, and I want to tell you, young man, if you are a-gon'-ah be our preacher, you'd better know a lot about that book, too. You'll find people there in every one of your churches that'll sit there and look at you while you are-a-readin' the Bible, and if you don't read it right, they will tell you about it."

By this time, I was "all ears," and probably never listened with more undivided attention to anyone in my life!

"And son," — the old fellow continued, after a brief pause, "it's mighty rugged up there; mighty rugged indeed! You'll see what I mean! We got lots of laurel thickets, and rock cliffs, and tall pines and rushing waters there in Nicholas. But you'll know when you see it that it's the prettiest place in the world. And the best thing about old Nicholas is that we got good people there; the best people in the world. If you treat 'em right, and they like ye', ye' can have a mighty nice time; mighty nice! But if you go to getin' smart with 'em, they won't like ye' and —" He hesitated, raising his eyebrows and shrugging his shoulders, "well, anyway, you will soon find out," he said.

After pausing for a few moments to allow time for me to "digest" and re-act to what he had said, and observing me most closely as I did so, he broke in again:

"And son," he continued, "I just got one little bit of advise fer ye'."



I assured him that anything he could tell me that would help me to succeed in my first charge would be very much appreciated!—

"Well," he said. "it ain't much that I got to say to ye' and you can take it for what it's worth. But I suggest that you keep in mind that us folks up there in Nicholas are all related! You see, we are the O'Dells, the Dorseys, the McClungs and the Groves, and you'll find also a lot of Dooleys and Ramseys and Wisemans and Hughes, and lots of other good plain folks. And we're all pretty much akin, if you know what I mean! If we ain't akin by blood we're akin by marriage and all of that sort of thing! So, you see, if you are a-gon'-ah say anything bad about anyone, who are ye' a-gon'-ah say it to? And if you do say something bad about any of us you had better be prepared to fight us all, or to run like—you know what—back where ye' come from!"—

The Man From Nicholas looked very stern for a few moments after this advise and continued to observe me very closely. Doubtless he saw that I was disturbed and uneasy. He began to laugh loudly!

"Oh, don't look so serious," he said, "don't worry about it! You'll do all right; you'll get along just fine."

Well, the man from Nicholas, obviously trying to compensate for my fear of the situation which had suddenly developed, began talking about other things. He asked if I liked to hunt. He told me that he had some of the best fox hounds in the country and that he and his sons would be glad to take me hunting with them, if I thought I'd like that. He told me about his country store, where I would be welcome at any time, and where it would be a good place to get acquainted with my members on Saturday. He talked on for a long time, and told me many interesting things. —

Almost before we realized it, it had grown quite late. The crowd had disbursed, the ministers and delegates attending the Conference had gone home for the night and it had grown quiet in the streets in front of the church. The Man From Nicholas left me, but before he went away, he urged me to hurry up and move and said that he would be looking for me high up

in the mountains of old Nicholas, "God's Country." As he shook hands with me, and turned to walk away, he said with a chuckle: "So long, son, I'll be seeing you soon up above!"

The Man From Nicholas, as you who are familiar with that county have possibly already guessed, was the late Mr. Wesley Dooley. More is to be written about him later, at various sections of these writings.

## CHURCHES AND BOUNDARIES

1933 - 1937

The Earl Charge comprised roughly one-third of Nicholas County and was divided more or less equally between two magisterial districts of the County, namely Kentucky District, commonly known as the Promise Land and the Wilderness District, with Hominy Creek forming a natural boundary between them. The circuit was bounded on the north and west by Gauley River; on the east by Cherry River and on the south by Meadow River.

It was seventy-six miles around the charge from the parsonage to each of the nine churches and back again to the parsonage. The churches of the charge were:

Jordan Chapel, at Canvas;  
Mount Zion, at Nettie;  
Macedonia, near Fenwick;  
Beckley, at O'Delltown;  
Glad Tidings, at Mount Nebo;  
Hickory Grove, near Mount Nebo;  
Dixon, at Bruce;  
Vale, (Buckhorn), in the Wilderness and  
Peniel, at Hominy Falls.

At the time of my appointment, the Earl Charge was in the Buckhannon district. Re-districting in the West Virginia Conference while we were in Nicholas placed the charge in the Charleston district. Later the charge was placed in the Beckley district. Currently it is in the Lewisburg district. We were



geographically in a position to get "pushed around!" The charge itself has undergone many changes since my day in Nicholas. There is still an Earl Charge, but it is not the charge that I knew. The churches that comprised the Earl Charge in my time are now a part of at least three other charges and possibly four.

While membership families in the churches were scattered over a vast geographical area that may generally be bounded by the rivers, as I have indicated, the churches were spiritually bounded on the north, south, east and west by faith, hope, friendship and love. They were "bounded" by the Love of God, which is "unbounded" and which extends throughout all limitations of time and space to the dateless ages of a never ending eternity. It was within that boundary that we lived and moved and had our being on the Earl Charge in Nicholas.

Speaking of boundaries, I might add that from a physical and material standpoint, we were "bounded" in the wintertime by thirty-foot snow drifts, in the spring, summer, fall and winter we were bounded by economic considerations with hardly anyone having any money to provide anything beyond mere necessities of life. This helped to keep us all humble and unbounded in our sympathies and in our faith in our kind Heavenly Father.

## ARRIVING IN NICHOLAS

On a rainy afternoon a few weeks following the encounter with the Man From Nicholas at the conference in Parkersburg, My good wife, Catherine and I saw for the first time the parsonage of the Earl Circuit of The Methodist Church in Nicholas County. It was located off State Route number thirty-nine, six miles out of Summersville, east, toward Richwood.

The parsonage, a two-story frame farm house in a bad state of repair from having weathered the storms of many years, stood close by an infrequently traveled dirt road and in the edge of a woods. Behind the parsonage, two tenths of a mile across a stony pasture field, was the home of our nearest neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Neil and their three children, Thelma, Mabel and

Harold. In the parsonage yard, symbolizing strength and beauty, stood a great oak and also a large pine tree. In memory I can still hear the mournful sound of the wind in the pine, and can still see the sturdy branches of the oak waving to and fro in the wind and shedding their acorns by the bushels in the yard.

The state of repair of the parsonage was deplorable, although I want to hasten to say that this wasn't a reflection upon the good people of the charge, but rather upon the times. It was in the midst of the great depression and there simply wasn't money available to repair the old house. I remember that the floor of the house in the living room had pulled away from the wall, so that snow would blow in across the floor through the opening at the base of the wall. One morning, during our first Summer there, we awakened to find that a small snake had gained entrance to the house. The snake, trying desperately to get away, could not, because it could not gain enough traction on the linoleum covering that was on the floor. It wiggled and squirmed until it wore itself out. — Incidentally, after I had concluded my encounter with the snake, Catherine then got down off the kitchen table from which vantage point she had watched the fight! —

Water supply for the parsonage was from a well on the back porch and was attained by the use of a long bailer which was lowered into the well on a rope attached to a crank. We were soon to learn that it wasn't always a good idea in the winter time to secure water from the well for use on the following day, for it would freeze into solid ice in the kitchen during the night.

Fuel with which to cook and heat the house consisted of wood and coal. I will not soon forget what a job it was to provide enough wood for these purposes. I would cut down trees near the log roads in the adjacent woods and would saw them into proper lengths to fit into the wood stove and fire-place and split the wood with the ax. I have an interesting story to tell about this later under the caption "The Case Of The Bouncing Ax." —

Anyway, to get back to the story of our arrival; I recall that it was a most gloomy evening and I wouldn't be quite honest if I didn't tell you that we felt a great deal like running away! The



frost had been on the pumpkin several days and the Fall rains had already begun. The leaves had turned to their beautiful autumn colors of gold and yellow, but there was no sunshine that evening to highlight them. It was a dismal, dreary evening and the appearance of our new home was one of gloom accentuated by drizzling rain and falling leaves.

A tinge of loneliness was a very definite part of our first day's experiences in Nicholas. Catherine and I had been used to living close to other families in the city, but on this depressing evening we were very much alone. As some of our Nicholas friends might phrase it, we felt that we were a "pretty far peace from home!" The reception committee that had been present to welcome us was "Sark" and "Tom," our neighbor's big black bird dog and the former pastor's tom cat that he had left behind when he moved from the parsonage a few days before. "Sark" and "Tom" were most friendly and cordial. They were obviously glad to have us and, with much tail-wagging and meowing, they did their very best to make us feel welcome. We had been delayed in coming into the community following conference, due to a most serious illness that I had experienced and from which my recovery has been regarded by my doctors as a miracle. However, there had been no way for the good people of our charge to know when we were to arrive in Nicholas or they would have been on hand to welcome us.

Communications on the Earl Charge was a problem. There was no telephone service connecting the communities in which our nine churches were located. There was a box type phone, with a crank on it, at the parsonage. However, this was a party line phone on which, if you had plenty of time and patience, you could sometimes call a family a mile or so down the road. If we wanted to call Summersville, a distance of only six miles, we would ring the Stewart McClung family a mile or so away and they would relay the message on down the road and eventually to Summersville. Sometimes, by walking to the home of a neighbor, Mrs. Etta Ray Groves, who lived two or three tenths of a mile across the fields, I could use her phone and could talk direct to Summersville. However, the Jordan Chapel community, in

which the parsonage was located, was most fortunate to have even this much telephone service. The other communities in which the churches were located were in the more remote sections of the County and farther from Summersville and didn't have as much as the semblance of a party line. You may well imagine what it was like there in the winter time when, with snow drifts thirty feet deep, an emergency arose in which a doctor was needed! Someone would have to go on horseback several miles to Summersville, or Quinwood, or Richwood in quest of a doctor. The doctor, when finally located, would have to make the trip back in the same way. Think of the hours that would pass before help could arrive! — Incidentally, this explains how the late Dr. Charley Beam, a veterinary who lived in the Wilderness district, was called upon many times to administer to human beings until the licensed medical doctor could arrive. Dr. Beam, about whom much more is to be said later, is credited with saving many lives and has become something of a legend in the Wilderness. —

However, I said earlier that "The frost was on the pumpkin" several days before our arrival in Nicholas. May I add now that "the fodder was also in the shock," and that this had something to do with the day of our arrival in Nicholas. Across the road in front of the parsonage toward the west, was several acres of land on which corn had been grown that year. The corn-cutting had taken place several days before, and the fodder had been in the shock. But there had been a terrific wind storm, however, which had blown down the shocks, leaving the field in disarray. A negro had come to the field to set up the shocks and put things in order. It was good to see someone with whom we could talk. I crossed the road and old rail fence into the field and became acquainted. He was most friendly and helpful and gave us information which we needed. I saw him often during the following four years at the Earl Charge and learned to have good respect for him. On one occasion I went to his home, a small cottage located about a mile from the parsonage and conducted the funeral of his grandchild.—

Anyway, it wasn't going to be very long before we received our first visitor at the parsonage, someone who would liven things



up and give us all a more cheerful outlook. — There came the welcomed sound of children laughing along the road in the woods below the parsonage. At first we merely heard it in the distance but it was coming closer now.

“HI THERE!”

We were thrilled when at last there came a rapping on the parsonage door! It was Miss Rachael Groves, a grade school pupil who had come by on her way home from school.

“Hi There!” she said, with a pleasing smile on her face and came walking right in as though she had always known us and was on familiar ground.

“I just thought I’d come to see the new preacher,” she continued, as she set down her little blue lunch box and books and “plopped” down in the nearest chair. “Mother said you’d come some day! My name’s Rachael. I live over by the church. I know your name!”

Little Rachael not only knew our name, she knew everyone else’s name! She was a “Bundle of sunshine” on a cloudy day! Her conversation and attitude gave us a favorable impression of the whole charge. After our visit with her that evening, we had the feeling that we understood the meaning of the quotation, “A little child shall lead them,” (Isaiah 11:6). With her pleasing smile and delightful conversation, she rescued our spirits from “The slough of despond.” She brought about an improvement in our attitude, leading us on to that “Higher ground,” which we used to sing about in our churches. I believe, on second thought, that the old hymn spoke of it in this way: “I’m pressing on that upward way, new heights I’m gaining every day!” After Rachael came to us that evening in the midst of our gloom we felt that we were gaining new heights every minute!

We have talked so much about Rachael, our first visitor on our first charge and our first night in Nicholas. We have wondered if she remembers it and if she ever knew the good that she had done. One never knows the true significance of any moment

of his life and the influence that it may have upon the lives of others, and upon the future. Little did I realize that evening that I would be sitting at a typewriter, thirty-five years later, and trying to explain what a brief visit by a little grade school girl had meant to us.

In thinking more about that visit that Rachael had made, and of things she had said to us, I am reminded of how happy we are, — and always have been, — to belong to the church and thus to be a part of the greatest fellowship known to man, a fellowship in which one's name is known. "I know your name," she had said. That means so much. In a world like that in which we live today, it isn't difficult to find oneself in a situation where his name is not known and in which no one really cares. We are all social beings. Happily the fellowship of the church is available to everyone in this wonderful country of ours. The church, inspite of the way in which it has been criticized, is still a fellowship of our world's greatest people whose faith and experience has taught us that God is not dead, that he is "The same yesterday, today and forever," and that "He knows our name!"

### "LET THERE BE LIGHT"

Soon the first night in Nicholas was upon us. When darkness came that evening it brought with it a new experience, that of lighting an old oil lamp and of carrying it about wherever light was needed. By comparison with the electric lights to which we were accustomed, — and which, incidentally, we had taken for granted, — the light of the kerosene lamp seemed most inadequate and undependable. If anyone had told me that evening that my sermons, together with studies on the Conference Courses for Supply Pastors would have to be done in the light of this flickering red flame, I would have thought it practically impossible. I was destined to learn, however, that it was not only possible, but was a necessity.

Two years later, on our fourth wedding anniversary, Catherine and I threw what we considered to be a real splurge; we purchased an aladdin lamp. This lamp burned oil also, but had



a mantel and gave a beautiful white light. It was a great improvement over the old lamp. The lamp had cost five dollars and some few cents, but we felt that this extravagance in purchasing it was justified on the grounds that it was to help us commemorate our anniversary.

When finally we had our new lamp, we kept the old one, and now, after thirty-five years, we still have it! It is being kept, not as a relic of the past, but as a symbol and a reminder of something that I hope we will never forget. It serves to remind us that in the spiritual darkness and despair of my most trying hour, the wonderful people of Nicholas County befriended us in such a way that the light of hope and faith shined again, and my ministry that had seemed to be over before it got started, was made possible. A brief paragraph of explanation of this will suffice.

As I mentioned earlier, when I finished high school and found that there was no hope of college, it seemed to sound the "death-knell" on my ministry. It isn't hard to understand how it could have seemed that way. My call to the ministry was clear from the beginning and was continuous, it never ceased. There was no question in my mind with regard to that, nor has there ever been! However, my church, — of which there is none greater, — was insisting that a high standard of educational requirements, including college and seminary, be established for the ministry. I approved of this demand and was most willing to comply with it. But there was no way to comply! I appealed to every source I knew. Here was an inconsistency that I simply couldn't understand. It threw me into spiritual darkness with the light of hope and faith and inspiration for my ministry almost gone. However, in the midst of this darkness and despair, "God said, 'LET THERE BE LIGHT' and there was light!" Through the kindness of the good people of Nicholas County, God let his light shine upon our pathway, and my ministry was made possible.

In a time of great difficulty, the Psalmist said: "I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Ps. 27:13

Undoubtedly this came true for he goes on to say so many times: "O give thanks unto the Lord . . . remember the wonderful works that he has done. . ."<sup>1</sup> This is how I continue to use the old oil lamp from the parsonage at Nicholas County, it serves to remind me daily that I too have seen "The goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."

I cannot keep from saying at this point that, in my humble opinion, much of the unhappiness of our world today is due to the fact that people are inclined to forget too easily. A characteristic phrase often heard is, — "Ah, forget it!" Hardly a day goes by that one doesn't hear it. I realize, of course, that it isn't good to live too much in the past, but, by the same token, it isn't especially commendable to forget the past, either; especially when you have seen, as I know all of us have, if we would care to admit it, "The goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."

I am not a very keen observer of human behaviour, but I have noticed that it isn't very long after a person loses his sense of appreciation for the light of God's love that has shined upon our world through the church, that he assumes his chip-on-the-shoulder attitude, begins feeling sorry for himself and then the next thing you know he has joined the ranks of the "God is dead" clan. Now he is getting ready to be really miserable; he has no appreciation for the past, and, since his God is dead, he can hardly take any comfort whatsoever in the future, and his present is confused and unhappy, and with no security anywhere! Well, to put it in the vernacular, he is "quite a mess," isn't he? Maybe he should come over and let me tell him about my lamp! It would be good if such a person were reminded of some of the things that the old lamp reminds me of. God still says to our world, "Let there be light!" But man is a free moral agent and if there is light, man too will have to say: "Let there be light!" —

However, it was a thrilling experience to stay that first night in the parsonage of the Earl Charge. I can still remember the meaning of the wind in the pine tree at the corner of the house and in the woods near by. We were alarmed some of the time

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1. Ps. 105:1



by creaking sounds throughout all the rooms of the house as the wind would strike with sudden fury. Occasionally a gust of wind would cause a down draft through the chimney, throwing sparks out into the floor. There were drafts of fresh air from everywhere, and doors to both the kitchen and the living room would constantly move, partially opening and closing. The strong wind continued throughout the night. We didn't sleep much.

It was a real thrill and inspiration to know that somewhere beyond the fields and blue mountains which we had seen that evening before darkness came, were our churches, — all nine of them, — looking forward to meeting and working with us in the Kingdom of our Heavenly Father. I wondered if the members would be disappointed with us? I wasn't certain about that, but I was certain about one thing, namely, the message that I had come to share with them! They wouldn't be disappointed with that! This had been "Glad Tidings of great joy"<sup>1</sup> from the beginning. It still was. If there was any disappointment on the part of our people, it would be with me, not with what I had come to say to them.

### SENDING UP OUR SMOKE SIGNAL

The next morning after that first night in the parsonage, with scarcely anyone knowing we had arrived in Nicholas, excepting our negro friend whom I had met in the corn field and Rachael Groves, who had been our first visitor at the parsonage, we were startled by a loud voice calling:

"Hellooh! Hellooh! Anybody at home in there?"

It was the U. S. mailman, Mr. McClung, out front on his horse and wanting to make our acquaintance.

"I saw the smoke from your chimney," he continued, "I knew you must be there somewhere. Don't anybody know you are here. I'll pass the word along on my route," he said, "you'll soon have plenty of company."

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1. Luke 2:10

We soon began to have visitors from several communities. Mr. McClung must have used the smoke signal, signal drums, grape vine, and many other means of communication to announce our arrival, judging from the number of people that came soon to see us. What he actually did, however, was to drop the news about our arrival at the C. W. A. McClung post office and store at Nettie, in addition to making the announcement to every home on his route. At some homes where he didn't see the people as he passed, he left a note in their mailbox. That evening when Mr. McClung arrived back in Canvas, he spread the news at the post office and store, then operated by Mr. Fay, "Turp," Bryant.

Incidentally, I learned later that a natural and expected service that the Methodist preacher was to perform was to be a news carrier. When I went into the various communities on my regular monthly schedule to conduct services, I was looked upon, not only as a preacher of the gospel who had come to preach, or to conduct a funeral, or to visit someone that was ill, but also as one who would have information about Uncle Grant, and Aunt Mary, and other relatives and friends who lived in other parts of Nicholas County that I also visited in my regular schedule each month. We had no Parish Paper! The preacher would carry information and messages from family to family throughout the Earl Charge.





***II.***

***IN THE PROMISE LAND***

## HOW WE WERE INTRODUCED IN THE "PROMISE LAND"

The first Sunday at Jordan Chapel in the Promise Land, the church was filled to capacity. The Class Leader, Mr. Walter Dooley, had the dubious pleasure and honor of introducing the new preacher and his wife. As the saying is, "he brought the house down!"

Mr. Dooley began his introduction by explaining that through relatives and friends, who lived at the pastor's hometown, — (Weston, West Virginia) —, he had always understood that women were scarce in that part of the country. "However," he went on to say, "when Catherine came to the Earl Charge bringing her husband, that little boy preacher, it caused me to change my mind. It is clear to me now that it is not the WOMEN but the MEN that are scarce at Weston."

The congregation burst into hearty laughter. After the laughter ceased and order was restored, Mr. Dooley continued:

"Now, I'm going to tell you his name. You will remember that we once had Rev. Steel for a pastor; then we had Rev. Soper for a pastor. Now I'm glad to tell you that we have got Rev. 'Lather' for a pastor."

Hearty laughter continued for a longer period this time before order could be restored. During this continued uproar of hilarious laughter, Mr. Dooley stood silently with a knowing look on his face and his dark eyes gleaming as much as to say, "Just wait, I'm not through yet!" When things quieted down enough, Mr. Dooley then came out with his real "Punch-line!"

"Friends," he continued, "I want you to know that in all probability we can now determine in advance what the name of our future pastors will be. For example, now that we have had Rev. Steel and Rev. Soper and Rev. 'Lather,' it is almost certain that the Bishop will next send us Rev. Shaver!"

At this the laughter really rose to great volume and throughout the service I could hear folks snickering once-in-a-while, and



trying to muffle their laughter. I remember that after the service that day there was more comment on Mr. Dooley's introduction than upon my sermon.

However, he did a fine job of introducing us and the congregation received us warmly. I recall that after the service that morning at Jordan Chapel, I felt more confident with regard to my future in Nicholas. The Jordan Chapel church was the strongest church on the charge, numerically, and was what one might call "the hub" of the circuit. If I had gotten off to a good start there, I felt that I would also get along well at the other churches.

### THE KEEPER OF THE PARSONAGE BEES

I have heard of "The Lord's Acre," and "The Lord's Auction," and other novel plans of supporting the work of the church. However, the Earl Charge was the only Methodist Charge I have known that had hives of bees with the parsonage property. This would help "sweeten up" the preacher and keep him from becoming soured!

Mr. Walter Dooley, who had introduced us in such an interesting way at Jordan Chapel, could always be depended upon to "hive" the bees when they swarmed and to secure the honey for the preacher when the time came for that rewarding but dangerous activity. During the process of taking care of this matter, Mr. Dooley would keep us spellbound by his natural and continuous flow of witty conversation. I have many times thought of him and wished that I had kept a record and compiled an anthology of the Wit Of Walter Dooley.

Once when he was taking the honey at the parsonage he said to us: "Love is like honey. It is oh, so sweet, but you are in danger of being badly stung in quest of it." At another time as he stood at the kitchen sink washing the excess honey off his hands, he made the remark that: "Puppy love is like honey; just a little 'hot water' and it washes away!"

One day this "Keeper of the parsonage bees" went with me to Macedonia church. He had attended services that morning at

Jordan Chapel, but went with me in the afternoon to help me through the mud to my afternoon appointment.

Just as I was about to announce my text and begin my sermon at Macedonia, Mr. Dooley arose and asked for permission to speak. He then turned to the congregation and said: "Friends, I want to tell you that I heard this preacher's sermon this morning at Jordan Chapel, and it was pretty good! And now I want him to know that if he wants to preach the same sermon this after-noon that it is quite alright with me, for I like cabbage warmed over!"

As I recall, the congregation enjoyed this remark thoroughly and continued to laugh long after Mr. Dooley ceased speaking. Incidentally, I remember that I did use the same sermon that afternoon, but I am not certain whether I had succeeded in "warming it over!"

I often think of "The Keeper Of The Parsonage Bees" when watching TV., and when some poor comedian is trying with all his wit to make people laugh and often having trouble in doing so, I feel so sorry and wish for him that Mr. Dooley could appear for the moment. He would help the poor fellow "get laughs!" He was never at loss for words and he could instantly see the humor in any situation.

However, when the time for seriousness came in the workings of our church, Mr. Dooley could be serious enough. He was a loyal and devoted church man. He was the teacher of the men's Bible class, served as a trustee and in about every office in the church at one time or another in the four years I had the honor of serving as his pastor. We at the parsonage were very fond of "The Keeper of The Parsonage Bees," and have valued his friendship across the years.

### THE CASE OF THE BOUNCING AX

"That is the funniest thing I ever saw!" Mr. Neil exclaimed, as he sat down on a stump to recover from weakening laughter. He had just witnessed the young preacher trying to split a gum log!

Mr. Neil had invited me to cut down trees on his land for firewood, for we had to cook and heat the parsonage with wood and coal. There were a number of trees standing in his pasture field near the parsonage. He had come along just as I was sawing one of them down with my "one-man-buck-saw." I had never heard of a power chain saw. I don't think they had been invented at that time.

However, when finally I had the tree down and a block of it sawed in proper length for the cook stove, I attempted to split it with the ax. To my surprise, the ax bounced as though I had struck a piece of hard rubber. Mr. Neil, who had stood by watching with the greatest of amusement, laughed until he couldn't stand up! I had wondered why he had stood for so long watching me, and with a knowing expression on his face, and shifting his crooked stem pipe first to one side of his mouth, then the other, and smiling until he couldn't puff on the pipe. He had known what was going to happen and so he was "hanging-around" not wanting to mis-out on the fun! He told everyone later that he wasn't surprised that the young preacher, being raised in the city, didn't know that a gum tree will not split, but that he thought it was a "one-ring circus" to watch him try it.

However, Mr. Neil then was very kind and helpful and instructed me on the proper use of the fallen tree for back-logs in the fireplace, thus my labors in cutting it down would not be in vain.

No pastor ever had finer neighbors than Mr. and Mrs. Neil and their children. They taught us many things that we had to know if we were to live there and hope to survive. Had it not been for Mr. Neil's help in the matter of securing fire wood, we would have been in serious trouble many times, especially since my wife, Catherine, is probably the world's champion "burner-upper" of fire wood, especially in the canning season. One year she canned seven hundred quarts of food. She was trying to fill the new saw-dust cellar that was built for us. However, imagine trying to provide fire wood for that worthy enterprise! I used to



resent cutting wood. Not that I didn't want to work, but that it took so much time from the churches.

Speaking of Mr. Neil reminds me of the wonderful times we had at his home listening to his radio. He would carry the batteries about two miles or so to Canvas to have them charged during the week. Then on Saturday night, we would go to his home, carrying our son on our shoulders, and wading through the snow, to enjoy this entertainment. We would listen to whatever came in loud and clear and that was usually the Grand Old Opra from Nashville, Tennessee. Anyway, these "toe-tapping" Saturday night sessions at the Neil home meant much to us.

We often think of these Saturday evenings at the Neil home, as we watch color Television. It is quite a change! I wouldn't have the old days return for anything, but the old days made a contribution to our lives and one has to admit that there were many good things about those days that are gone. For one thing, people had time for each other. How often in these busy days someone calls to us across a busy street, or as we sit at the intersection waiting for the light to change and asks: "You got a minute? I'd like to speak with you!" These are the best days however. If I could have chosen the time at which I was to live in the world, I would have chosen the present time. It's a great day! But it is irritating many times not to "Have a minute" for things one would like so much to do!

Incidentally, there comes to mind an incident that I heard somewhere that may be either humorous or pathetic, depending upon how you look at it. A group of men gathered on a street corner and were discussing an issue. A friend came hurrying by, brief case in hand, going to an appointment where he was to make an address. Someone in the group called to him and asked him what he thought about the matter they were discussing. "What do I think?" the man exclaimed, "I don't think: I haven't got time to think, I've got to make a speech!" Well, I suppose all of us have listened at one time or another to speeches which clearly indicated that the speaker hadn't had time to think.

## FRIENDS IN THE "PROMISE LAND"

Not far from the parsonage at Canvas lived the family of Mr. J. H. Groves that was to play an important part in our lives in Nicholas. I have vivid memories of this stately gentleman, sitting quietly in his chair leaning forward on his cane and discussing with me the problems that arose with regard to the work of the Jordan Chapel church and the Earl Charge. His judgment and advice in many regards, both personal and as regards the work of the church, was most appreciated. I never knew him to error in judgment. When I felt the need of the most reliable advice available, I went to Mr. Groves.

With Mr. Groves was his dear companion, whose influence was helpful to us all. In memory I can see her now with her beautiful white hair and neatly dressed, sitting at her knitting and taking a lively interest in the conversation.

The Groves children, who were most kind and helpful to the parsonage family, were all teachers and business men in Nicholas. They were eight of them.

The Groves family was more than material help to our charge; they were an inspiration in times of discouragement. Often we needed them! It wasn't all sunshine and laughter on the Earl Charge. We were not always in the "fairway!" Sometimes we found ourselves very much in the "rough," with hazards of a real nature between us and "the green!" In fact, to be very frank and honest, I might even add that there were times when we were in the "slough of despond," or, if not in it, surely we were many times in the immediate vicinity of it! There are people, I suppose, who are always on the "mountain top," and extremely happy, with no moments of depression; no sense of futility in the face of problems; but just completely radiant and triumphant at all times. That must be a wonderful state! When I think of this, there comes to mind some of the words of Paul who said, "Brethren I do not consider that I have made it my own. . ." <sup>1</sup> Of course,

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1. Php. 3:13

The Apostle was here making reference to something a little different than a state of complete personal happiness and contentment. But it will do no harm for me to borrow his line. It seems to me that it is completely normal and perhaps intended by our Creator that one should have an occasional "down-hour," that he might be able all the more to have the grace of gratitude when the sun shines again. Of course, Jesus was first on the Mountain of Transfiguration then into the Garden of Gethsemane; then upon the Cross, and then came the Resurrection! — — —

On a cold day not long ago, I was sitting around a nice warm fire in a service station, drinking a cup of hot coffee, and lamenting the fact that I was being inconvenienced by a flat tire, which was being repaired for me while I waited. As I sat there waiting, there came to mind the day that I was riding my horse near Hominy Falls when he began to weave back and forth, blunder, and seemed unstable. I discovered that snow and ice had "balled-up" on his hoofs. I had to dismount and remove the snow balls. This required a bit of "doing" as the saying is. It wasn't a very pleasant task. When I remembered about it, my lamentations relative to my flat tire ceased. I just relaxed by the nice warm fire and enjoyed my hot coffee. In a little while the tire was fixed. I signed a little card and was on my way. — The point I would like to make is that if there were no bad days in life by which you could compare the better days, you wouldn't enjoy the better days. In fact one might even complain about his better days, that they aren't good enough. I may repeat something that I've said somewhere else in these writings, namely, that "Last year's hardships may become this year's blessings."

However, to end this digression and get back to the Groves family, we often went to their home for "cheer-up" sessions when things were not going well. They meant so much to us in a spiritual way as well as to help us in countless ways in a material sense. We learned that one of the best things to do when we were down-hearted over anything was to go out to Groves. Maybe Gladys and Mattie, Vergie and Glenna and others there would take time out from whatever they were doing and set up the croquet set in the yard. We would get busy in the game and before you knew



it, we would be laughing and having a good time and enjoying life again.

Often when I would go to the Wilderness to be gone for many days in a revival at one of the churches, Catherine would become a star-border at the Groves home. It was not possible, transportation problems and other factors involved, for her to go with me. She would close up the parsonage and take up her abode with the Groves family. She and Glenna were like sisters. She was treated as one of the children. I often think of this good family and many others like them in Nicholas and when at worship the congregation stands to sing: "Bless be the time that binds," it has great significance to me.

Many of the dear ones in the Promise Land are gone now from our world of time and space, and when I think of them being gone there comes a lump in my throat! I hope that somehow, in that more real and eternal Promise Land to which they have gone, that they will know of our gratitude for all they did for us. Somehow, I feel that they know! There is that comforting teaching of our Kind Heavenly Father who brought immortality to light through the resurrection of our Lord and Master from the grave; and it was he who said that: "Because I live you shall live also."

### WE GOT POUNDED!

"You are going to be pounded some of these nights," was the rumor that arrived by the "grapevine." This gave Catherine and I no little concern, for we had never heard this expression and didn't know quite what to make of it. In the section where we had both been raised, being pounded might mean being "beaten up" or something of that nature.

However, just after lamp-lighting-time one evening, we heard muffled voices around in the yard under the pine tree at the corner of the house and behind the house at the coal-shed. All of a sudden it sounded as though everyone in the neighborhood came upon the back porch of the parsonage. The kitchen door burst open and someone yelled, "Surprise, Surprise!" It was the pounding crew!

The idea was that everyone should come to the parsonage at that time bringing a pound of something. We thought we had never seen so many groceries at one time in all our lives that was soon upon our kitchen table. There were pounds of coffee, pounds of lard, pounds of butter, pounds of sugar, and the list could continue on and on.

All of this made us very happy, and to understand our delight, one would have to have been acquainted with the financial conditions of those days. It was the decade of the depression and there wasn't much money anywhere. The pastor's salary was only six-hundred dollars a year from the whole charge of nine churches. You may well imagine under those circumstances how happy the "pounding" made us. The people of Nicholas were so kind and thoughtful of their minister. They would have paid us a much higher salary if it had been possible. But the fact of the matter was, the six-hundred dollar salary that they paid the pastor was much more than some of the families who belonged to the church received.

Incidentally, somewhere in one of Catherine's many scrap-books which she kept religiously, I saw recently a list which she had carefully kept of the items that came to us in poundings on the Earl Charge. It is most interesting. The list symbolizes the concern of the members of the charge for their pastor amid the trying times of depression years. The members were always doing nice things for us. I remember, for example, how that Mr. Rufas Dorsey, one of the members at Dixon, walked through the woods all the way to the parsonage, which was in the Promise Land, a distance of about eight miles, one way, and carrying on his back several gallons of black raspberries. He had attached the buckets containing the raspberries to a pole which he laid across his shoulders and neck, and in that way had managed to carry them. Well, when one has enjoyed the hospitality of people like this, is it any wonder that one's sense of gratitude deepens; that one has a compulsion to at least in some way try to acknowledge his gratitude even if he knows, as I do know, that there is no hope of adequately expressing it?

## A MEMORABLE SERENADE AT CANVAS

"Somebody has left the gate open, here comes old Prince!" said Uncle Homer, with an air of dismay, as we sat in the darkness on the front porch of the J. H. Groves home waiting for the serenade to get organized. But he had been mistaken in identifying the sound we had heard as being the pounding hoofs of old Prince, one of the farm horses, and this mistake is what gave rise to all the humor of the occasion.

Mr. Kyle Groves, youngest son of Mr. J. Hill Groves, at Canvas, had graduated at West Virginia Wesleyan College and had returned with his beautiful bride, whom he had met there. They were going to move into their new home which they had built a few hundred yards from the old home place. The whole neighborhood had turned out to serenade, or to "bell" them, as the Nicholas people would say.

It was dark, but the fields around the Groves home were full of people coming from all directions to take part in the serenade. Every once in a while you could hear a clanging noise as someone stumbled over something in the darkness and dropped his cow bell, or some other noise making instrument that he was carrying.

A committee had been charged with the responsibility of determining whether Kyle and Fae were actually in the new home across the way. Catherine, my wife, was on the committee.

It was finally ascertained that the young couple were at home. Catherine, filled with excitement, ran toward the Hill Groves home to announce that the serenade was about to begin. Upon hearing her run down the dirt road in the darkness, uncle Homer had thought that the gate had been left open and that one of the horses, old Prince, was getting out of the field into the main road. In a few moments, however, Catherine came up the walkway all out of breath from the running and everyone knew that she had been mistaken for old Prince. The laughter on the porch



among the several present was beyond all control. Uncle Homer rocked back and forth in his chair, slapping his knees, and laughing until his tears were falling.

Across the years, I have been so accustomed to sharing this story as a joke on Catherine that she sometimes says to me when friends come to call, "All right now, come on out with the 'old Prince' story and have it over!" She knows that I will inevitably tell the story before the evening is over. It is a good thing that she has a good sense of humor and can "take a joke." If she couldn't, I would doubtless be in serious trouble many times.

However, the serenade was a huge success. The noise was like the invasion of an army with all its artillery and implements of warfare turned loose at the same time. There were plowshares and band-saws being beaten with hammers; cowbells and shot guns and auto-horns and even a few blasts of dynamite. It grew louder and louder! What a crescendo! It was a memorable occasion.

A serenade, or "belling," was an interesting custom that has passed away with the changing times in most places. I have thought much about its meaning. I have understood at least this much about it, namely, that the more friends a person has the louder the noise at his "belling." Judging from that night, I was certain that the young couple must surely have a lot of friends.

### THE OLD REX "TALE"

This humorous story is really a tale in more ways than one, as you will see, and as Mr. Blaine Chapman, now living at Canvas, near the Jordan Chapel Church, may tell you. Believe me, he knows the story and can vouch for its validity. He can understand the "tail," for he is the one that made the original contact with it! The story has been told across thirty some years and shows no signs of wearing out. It never will, as long as this humble writer lives, and when I'm gone, it will doubtless continue by the printed page. In any case, Blaine isn't likely ever to hear the end of the tale.

Catherine and I were most happy when Blaine, and his good buddy, Howard Mason, started courting the Groves Girls, Mattie and Gladys, daughters of Mr. and Mrs. J. Hill Groves, who lived two or three miles out the road beyond the parsonage. It was company for us to see the dust rolling, almost every time we looked out, as either Blaine or Howard or both would be on their way to or from the Groves residence. We didn't blame them. The Groves sisters were fine girls and very attractive, too!

However, to get on with the "tail," one night Blaine had visited Gladys a little beyond regulation time. It was advisable for him to slip out as quietly as possible. He came "tip-toeing" across the front porch in the darkness and suddenly, with no possible warning, stepped down with all his weight upon the tail of old Rex, the family dog, that had decided to sleep that night on the front steps. He, — and quite possibly they, — let out a yell that echoed in the mountains! Under those circumstances, the yelp of the dog must have seemed amplified a thousand times over! — It may have been my imagination, but that night when Blaine went by the parsonage on his way home, he seemed to be going faster than usual. —

However, the story had a most happy ending. Blaine and Gladys were married and built their lovely home near the Jordan Chapel Church, close to the old parsonage. They have two lovely daughters. Howard and Mattie, who have three wonderful children, live in their beautiful home which they built in Summersville.

### A MOST UN-USUAL BAPTISM

"No, I can't wait until next third Sunday, and I don't want to be baptized by sprinkling, either. I want to be baptized by immersion right today!"

It was the voice of Mr. Asa Stull. He had started long before daybreak and had walked the eight miles from Nettie to the Parsonage at Canvas, and for no other purpose than to be baptized. I tried to reason with him that it would be better to wait until my appointment at his church on the next third Sunday of the

month, and that others would go with us to help with the service. Perhaps there would be others desiring to be baptized by immersion along with him. But he insisted that it was urgent, and he quoted some passages of the Bible that he had been thinking about. He would have no part of any procrastination.

Without any further debate, and deeply appreciative of Mr. Stull's sincerity, we started to Deepwell, on Deer Creek, where I had noticed a deep hole of water as I rode that way on my horse to Beckley Chapel.

Deepwell, as some few persons who read these lines may know, is about as desolate a place as one could possibly imagine. Surrounded by high mountains on all sides and with woods and thick underbrush everywhere, it gave one a feeling of being down in a well. However, it had received its name from an experimental well that had once been drilled there and not from its most desolate terrain. I was not exaggerating too much when I told some friends after seeing Deepwell for the first time that one would have to lay on his back to see the sun at 12:00 o'clock noon!

However, we arrived at Deepwell and came to the deep hole of water, located about twenty-five yards above the ford in Deer Creek. We sat down there on a sandbar. I read the scripture. We had prayer. I read the ritual, asking the questions. We sang a hymn, — or attempted to do so, — then we went into the water. There, with only the birds, the bees and the blooming rhododendron and possibly unobserved mountain owls and wildcats to witness, I immersed Mr. Stull in the name of The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit! — A more happy person I have never seen. He shouted for joy and thrashed about in the water for some time before we changed our clothing and continued on to his home in the Nettie community.

I have thought of this many times across the years and never without marveling at the faith and sincerity of Mr. Stull. Also, I have thought of what might have happened had there been an accident and one of us had been drowned in that deep hole of water. It might have been rather difficult to explain this to the



law officers in their investigation. Our story of how we had gone there alone to that most desolate spot for baptism would have seemed an unlikely story, which is to say the least.

We remember with grateful appreciation Mr. Stull's wonderful neighbors at Nettie, the late Mr. and Mrs. Elmer McMillion, at whose home we used to stay during revivals at Mount Zion. Also Mr. and Mrs. C. W. A. McClung, the John A. Kyle family, Walter Dorsey family and so many others that come marching across our minds when we think of Mt. Zion at Nettie, and of the Downtain church.

### WILDCATS SCREAM AT DEEPWELL

"Blood-curdling" would be a mild term to describe the fierce screams of a wildcat that were heard one dark night at Deepwell! The screams would have been frightening enough anywhere at any time and under any circumstances, but at Deepwell, alone and in the dark, — well, there are no words for it! It is only if, by any chance, you were ever at Deepwell that you can imagine what it was like! How to describe Deepwell to someone who has never been there would be a problem indeed. I described it to some extent in the previous section, but this does not do it justice. It seemed to me that it is about the most lonely place in the world. I do not believe in ghost, but if there are any, that's where they would be. I think it is no exaggeration to say that one would be able to see the sun there only at high noon.

Anyway, to those who may be acquainted with the locality, I will explain that I had been on a mission to O'Delltown, and was delayed until late evening in starting home. In fact, the man who was to have driven me home had let me down, making it necessary for me to walk. He had attended a wedding and had entered too much into the spirit of the occasion by way of the little brown jug. He was in no condition to drive. This created a real problem for me. I couldn't stay overnight at O'Delltown, for Catherine was alone at the parsonage at Canvas and I was already over-due to be home. There was no possible way to let her know what had happened. If I were to get home that night,

I would have to walk, as I've said. I was now confronted with a decision regarding the route to take. If I kept to the "beaten-path" it would be about fifteen miles by way of Nettie. If, however, I could "screw-up my courage" and become a little daring, I could reach the parsonage in about four miles through the deep woods and underbrush across Deepwell by way of Deer Creek. I decided on the near cut! I would take the dangerous route. I had been across there a few times on my horse. I knew the way, I thought, and would make it alright.

When I came to the home of Mr. M. R. Groves, the last house before starting down the steep mountain into the woods, Mr. Groves came out and tried to talk me out of trying to cross Deepwell that night. He said that I could become lost in those hollows and wouldn't be found for a month and maybe never. Instances had occurred, he said. But I told him that I'd make it alright. Catherine would be alarmed because I had not come home, and she would be afraid. She had never stayed by herself in the parsonage. So I started jogging down the road. It was now growing quite late, and when I left the cleared fields into the woods it was dark.

Then it happened! A few hundred yards before I reached Deer Creek, my hair literally stood on end as a wildcat gave out with the most hideous scream I had ever heard! My first impulse was to run. But on second thought I knew how steep and high the mountain was that I had yet to climb on the other side of Deer Creek. If I ran, I'd be exhausted before I even reached the foot of the mountain. Then too, I knew that if a wildcat were to attack me, running would do no good. I certainly couldn't hope to outrun a wildcat.

The cat came to within about fifty yards of me and seemed to keep that distance, screaming every minute or so. At first it frightened me when it would scream, but after awhile I was glad when it screamed for then I could judge where it was. It was those periods of time between the screams that were apprehensive and "hair-raising!" I walked backward all the way up that mountain on the other side, facing back into the night.

I have often thought of my behaviour in that situation, and wondered why I did that "back-walk-bit." What had been the point in my facing back into the dark? I couldn't have seen the wildcat had it been within ten feet of me. There must be a good illustration for a sermon somewhere in this, but I have never figured it out. When I do, I would like to come back to Nicholas and preach the sermon at O'Delltown.

However, I finally came to the home of Mr. J. H. Groves. I had gone to his home hundreds of times but never was I as glad to get there as at that time. Miss Glenna opened the door and said that I was as white as a sheet, and looked like a ghost. — Speaking of ghost, I wasn't the slightest afraid of ghosts at Deepwell, for I don't believe in ghosts, but I believe in wildcats, you may be certain of that! —

However, the night of the wildcat episode, had been a frightening night for Catherine also. She had never been alone before at night in Nicholas. When I arrived she had been very much afraid and was also quite worried about what had happened to me. I noticed that she had placed my old twelve gage shot gun on the bed with some shells close by. She explained that if she were in any danger she intended to place some pillows to her shoulder to keep the recoil of the gun from breaking her arm. I laughed and told her that by the time she went through all of this, something could have carried her away.

#### FOLLOWED BY A PANTHER?

"That was a panther! yelled one of the fellows excitedly, as a strange creature leaped off the bank above the road and darted into the brush in full view of the lights of our car.

"You're not kidding!" said the other boy in the car, who had seen it. I saw it too, but my thoughts were so preoccupied with what had happened at that same place the night before when I walked that way by myself, that I could scarcely say a word.

A series of meetings were being held at Beckley Chapel at O'Delltown. The roads were so bad that I would not undertake



to drive all the way to the church, but would leave the car at the junction of the Levasy road, which was stone base, and would walk the remaining two and one-half miles to the church. I had been making the return trip alone to the car the night before. It had been a most beautiful, moonlit night. I had enjoyed the walk thoroughly, walking along with the moonbeams shining down through the trees upon the road and reflecting in the frost and thin ice in the mud-puddles. However, my enjoyment of the beautiful night was not to last too long, for suddenly I became aware that I was being followed. I kept hearing the snap of twigs in the brush below the road and behind me, but could not see what it was. Whenever I would stop to listen, the noise would stop; when I started to walk on, it would start again. It kept this up all the way to the car. After awhile, I thought I knew what it could be. I had received an offering that night at the service and someone was following me and intending to rob me for the offering. Whatever it was, however, it followed me all the way to my car.

The next evening when planning to go back over the same road to the church, I invited two young men at the C.W.A. McClung store at Nettie to go with me. With the big strong fellows with me to help if my car became stuck in mud, I ventured to drive all the way to the church instead of leaving it at the intersection on the stone base road. As we made the return trip after church that night all three of us in the car saw a panther leap across the road at the very place where I had been followed the night before.

The question now arises, had I actually been followed by a panther the night before? I'll always think that I was, although I did not see it until the following night when it leaped across the road in front of the car, as I have explained.

There was ample evidence, in addition to the witness of those in the car that night, that a panther was in that section of Nicholas. At about this time also, Mrs. Bond, who lived the first house down the road behind Beckley Chapel church, was milking the cows near her home when the cows were suddenly frightened and began

to run away. Looking up she saw a panther leap over the rail fence and dart off into the woods.

In another community, a short distance from there, a farmer had lost a calf, which had been killed by some kind of wild animal. In an adjoining county, two panthers had been killed as they were attacking the sheep.

I may add, that if I had known the night before that there was a possibility that I was being followed by a panther, Mr. John Glenn might not have been the first American in space! At the snapping of the first twig, I would have "blasted off."

### A MOST HECTIC WEDDING

"Speak louder, son! I can't 'er ye!" shouted the Groom, then in his eighties and extremely hard of hearing and being married to a young widow less than half his age. The ceremony was being performed by an inexperienced, timid, twenty-one year old preacher who had never conducted a wedding and who, on this day, was tense and nervous before it even started!

Anyway, my friends, there you have all the ingredients for one of the most humorous situations that one could possibly imagine despite the fact that it was to have been a most solemn occasion.

To start at the beginning, the Bride and her party, who were to have picked me up at the parsonage on their way to the mountain home of "John Doe," where the wedding was to be performed, were two hours late. The driver of the car had been premature in his celebrating and had taken on too much "punch." We were lucky to have arrived on the scene of action in the first place. However, when we arrived at the home of the Groom, we found that he had decided that his Bride-to-be had gone back on him and was not coming. Thereupon he had removed his wedding garments, put on his overalls and had gone out into the woods to look for his hogs. Being extremely hard of hearing, it was difficult to attract his attention and we couldn't find him. Someone came up with the idea of firing shotguns and beating on plowshares to attract him back to the house. We did this! It

worked, but isn't it ridiculous? There we were having the serenade before the wedding. Anyway, in a few minutes here came "John Doe," all out of breath and excited!

But now a new problem arose. The groom had changed from his wedding garments and now he wanted to put them back on again, we couldn't find his white shirt! Everyone joined in the search. It was found eventually behind the bed on the floor. At long last, and with the services of many volunteer helpers, he was properly clothed and took his position!

Finally all was ready for the ceremony. Quietness fell over the humble scene. I began the ritual. Soon we came to the point at which the Groom was to have taken hold of the Bride's hand and repeat after me. I so instructed him.

"Alright, alright!" he said, "go ahead, go ahead!"

"I 'John Doe,' take thee, 'Mary Doe' to be my wedded wife." I paused for Mr. "Doe" to repeat. But instead of repeating after me, Mr. "Doe" placed his free hand behind his ear, and leaning toward me, said, "How ye' say? How ye' say?"

I started over; "I 'John Doe' take thee, 'Mary Doe' to be my wedded wife!" I waited, but instead of repeating this, "Mr. Doe" let loose of the Bride's hand and placing both hands behind his ears leaned far over toward me and shouted, "How ye' say, how ye say! Speak louder, son, I can't 'ere ye!"

By this time I was beginning to be very nervous and my knees were slightly unsteady. I had practiced this ceremony at the parsonage, but I had not anticipated this turn of events.

We tried again. This time at the top of our voice! The same result, "I can't 'ere ye," he said.

By this time I was about to panic! We tried once more, but to no avail. It was only a repeat of the results of the previous efforts.

It finally dawned on me like a ray of sunshine in the darkness that I might possibly read the passage and ask "Mr. Doe" to say "I Will," after it. I tried this. Again I was thwarted. By this time, poor "Mr. Doe" was so utterly confused and excited



that he didn't even attempt to say "I will." He just stood there looking at me with a puzzled look, and I could see horror written all over his face.

Silence prevailed! Tension in the party was so dense that you could have cut it with a knife. I tried once again, re-reading the whole passage. This time, "Mr. Doe" stuttered, "I Will!"

At this moment, the tension being relieved, the whole party breathed a most audible sigh of relief. The sigh was as perfectly in unison as if it had been rehearsed for days. It was as though all members of the party had attempted to blow out the candles on a birthday cake at the same time. However, the groom's, "I will," which we had all been waiting for, was one of the most welcomed utterances I've ever heard. It made me feel like a man condemned to the electric chair who had received a pardon from the governor in the last minute before the switch was thrown. I can laugh about it now, but believe me, it wasn't a laughing matter for me that day! It was something that I will never forget.

Meanwhile, the man who had been driving the car and who had received too much "punch," was standing in the corner of the room. In fact, if he had not been standing in the corner in which he could brace himself, he could not have been standing! However, when the Groom finally said, "I Will," the man in the corner looked across the room to "Mr. Rock Doe," brother of the Groom, and said:

"That's alright, ain't it 'Rock?' By (censured) that's alright," and at that moment, his feet slipped and he came sliding to the floor and lay there, making no effort to get up!

I kept reading, and as I read, I wondered if the man had fallen dead, or if he passed out from too much "punch!"

Anyway, Mr. "Rock Doe," had answered that he thought it was alright. Personally, I felt that it was alright too, and if it wasn't, there was nothing more that I could do about it. I had already married the couple at least four times that afternoon. Thus endeth what I believe to have been the most hectic wedding that ever took place in Nicholas.

## INSIGHT ON "THE KNOB"

Once while visiting at the home of Mr. M. R. Groves, near the Beckley Church, I had a most wonderful experience to which no humor whatsoever was attached. During the visit we walked to the top of a high mountain near his home, which he called "The Knob." The view from this high elevation was most magnificent. I was thrilled beyond words at the beauty of the surrounding mountains. I wondered if there could possibly be in all this world, a more inspiring view! Someone has well said that, "A thing of beauty is a joy forever." It never fades!

As I looked upon the blue mountain ranges in every direction, I thought of the familiar quotations: "I lift up my eyes to the hills. From whence does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth."<sup>1</sup> Also, I remembered the Psalmist words that "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people, from this time forth and for evermore."<sup>2</sup> And also, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hast formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting thou art God."<sup>3</sup> I felt that I too was lifting up my eyes unto the hills from whence my help must also come, that as the mountains round about Jerusalem had reminded the Psalmist of the protective presence of God, so the mountains of Nicholas were round and about the Earl Charge, and should remind me of the same truth. Before the mountains were created, and long after they vanish away, even "From everlasting to everlasting," he is God. "A thousand years in his sight is but as yesterday when it is past and as a watch in the night."<sup>4</sup> While the earth itself, and all that is in it, is always changing, he will not change, but is "The same yesterday, today, and forever."<sup>5</sup> His power does not change; his love does not change, and best of all, nothing shall separate us from his love. In his letter to the Romans, Paul brought this to mind: "Who shall separate us from

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1. Ps. 121 :1, 2

2. Ps. 125 : 2

3. Ps. 90 : 2

4. Ps. 90 : 4

5. Heb. 13 : 8

the love of Christ? . . . I am sure that neither death nor life, . . . nor things present nor things to come . . . will be able to separate us from the Love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."<sup>1</sup>

After some hesitation, Mr. Groves said that he had a problem of faith that he would like to talk over. He spoke of a son who was painfully afflicted. "Why," he asked, "would a kind and loving Heavenly Father allow this affliction to come upon an innocent child?"

There came instantly to mind the story of Jesus and the man born blind.<sup>2</sup> The Master had been asked a question related in some ways to this. He had said that neither the parents or the child had sinned that he was born blind, "But that the works of God might be made manifest in him."<sup>2</sup>

"This does not help me," Mr. Groves continued, "for I simply cannot see how the suffering of a little child could in any way 'make manifest the works of God.'" However, ideas of how this could be possible came to mind and were satisfying to me, and to some extent helpful also to Mr. Groves, although I do not believe the ideas were entirely satisfying to him.

However, I suggested that the suffering of the child, for one thing, would deepen one's sympathy. It would be one of the attributes of a Christian Spirit that one would be a man of sympathy and love and concern with regard to all suffering. In fact Jesus himself wept in sympathy with those in distress. Anyway, in the deepening of one's sympathy "The works of God" in some degree would be "Made manifest." The Apostle Paul once admonished that we should, "Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus . . ."<sup>3</sup> This is not possible without sympathy. If in the presence of a suffering child one's sympathy is deepened to the point that his own attitude becomes more like that of Christ, has not the Will of God been made manifest to that degree?

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1. Rom. 8; 35-39

2. John 9; 1

3. Phil. 2; 5



Then too, knowledge of the suffering of a child, and the feeling of helplessness in the face of it is more than likely to drive a person to his knees in prayer! Most everyone has known of instances in which men, who have abandoned the practice of prayer, renewed their prayer life in the face of suffering. The abandoning of prayer had, by the same token, separated them from an awareness of God's imminence and his love. The renewal of their prayer life had made them sensitive again to his redeeming love. The suffering of an innocent child, as unfair and mysterious as it is, could possibly result in the renewal of the prayer-life of many adults. In this way "The works of God might be made manifest."

In the third place, isn't it possible that faith itself, instead of being weakened and destroyed, may in reality be strengthened in the face of the suffering of a child? Faith is a value within itself far beyond that of material possessions. However, without mysteries and problems to baffle us, there could be no faith! Just as the physical body could not develop without exercise, so the spiritual life, of which faith is such an indispensable part, could not develop without mysteries as obstacles against which it could be exercised.

Anyway, sympathy, prayer, faith and love too, may be deepened and strengthened in the presence of a suffering child. Thus the "Works of God may be made manifest!"

Then too, I asked him to think of the fact that God has all of eternity in which to compensate the dear child of which he spoke. When we consider that "A thousand years in God's sight is but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night;"<sup>1</sup> and when we think of the life span in terms of years of men in the perspective of eternity, what difference will it make what we may have suffered here? As Paul would say, "This slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison."<sup>2</sup> And again, "I consider that the suffering of this present time is not worth comparing with the glory

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1. Ps. 90; 4

2. II Cor. 4; 17

that is to be revealed in us.”<sup>1</sup> It was his faith, and should be ours also, that “We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.”<sup>2</sup>

However, these were among the thoughts that came to mind that day on “The Knob.” Whether they constitute THE answer to the problem raised by Mr. Groves or not, they constitute AN answer that is satisfying and helpful to me. Doubtless we will all have to look at many things as “Through a glass darkly!”<sup>3</sup> But “Faith is the victory that overcomes the world!”<sup>4</sup>

### “HOW TEDIOUS AND TASTELESS THE HOUR”

The first service at Beckley Chapel at O’Delltown, near Nettie, was a most tense experience. It gave me some very anxious moments. There were only a few people present, perhaps twenty-five and I was told that this was a good turn out and represented about every family in the community. However, two very interesting and unusual things occurred. While both of them are funny enough as I recall them now, they were both of a most serious nature and nothing to laugh about at the time.

The late Mr. M. R. Groves, commonly known as “Doc,” was to lead the singing. I had told him that I would rather he would choose the hymns for he would know more how to choose them, being familiar with the congregation. He had said that he would, but had continued to visit with the congregation until after the appointed time for the service to begin. After a brief period of time had elapsed I went to the pulpit and called the service to order, saying that John Wesley had insisted that all services should begin on time. Just as I did this, and as the congregation was quieting down, I heard brother Groves exclaim: “How Tedious and Tasteless The Hour!” Now, of course, I did not know that this was the title of the hymn that he was announcing, but wondered if he was having reference to the hour of my service! Anyway, the

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1. Romans 8; 18

2. Romans 8; 28

3. I Cor. 13; 12

4. I John 5; 4

Hymn was sung, and I thought it was a most beautiful one. It was in the Old Methodist Hymnal, but I believe possibly has been eliminated from the New Hymnal. The words of the hymn, I thought were beautiful and conveyed great meaning. In the old Methodist hymnal, it was number 349.

A second interesting thing occurred at that first service at Beckley Chapel; something that thoroughly un-nerved me and gave me a very rough time, although the person causing this had no intentions whatever of disturbing me. Over to my right in the "Amen Corner," sat brother Henry O'Dell, a good man whom I learned to respect, and in whose home I was to visit many times in the four years in Nicholas. Brother O'Dell was distinguished in his physical appearance by an unusually long red beard. His beard, when he was in a sitting position, folded across his knees. He was a good listener, although he was hard of hearing, and in his efforts to hear my sermon leaned far out toward me. Suddenly, just as I had my sermon under way, he exclaimed in a loud voice; "Oh! . . . Oh!" Two or three times during the sermon he did this. Each time that he did it, I would become lost in what I was saying and would look at him in amazement, thinking that he had become suddenly ill, or that I had said something that hurt him badly, or that, maybe, he was meaning to heckle me! But none of these things was the answer. Friends told me later that he had done this for years, and that no one ever knew why. I intended, after we became good friends, to ask him about this, but never did. It was just something that I had to get accustomed to at Beckley Chapel. —

Having mentioned Beckley, there comes to mind another member of the church there that made a lasting impression on many people, brother Jake O'Dell. I will never forget the earnestness of his prayers at church. In praying, he would walk on his knees up and down through the church, from the altar all the way back to the door, and back to the front again. In praying he would extend his hands upward toward the ceiling and his strong voice could be heard for a great distance. Mr. O'Dell had very large and heavy hands, made so by hard work throughout his life



in the woods and on the farm. One time when he was walking on his knees in a most earnest prayer, he came up behind me as I was kneeling to counsel with someone who had come to the altar. Mr. O'Dell slapped me on the back with such force that it knocked the breath out of me. I got up and went to an open window trying to regain my breath. It seemed to me as though I had been hit by one of the tackles on a professional football team. Mr. O'Dell never knew what he had done. It was a long while after this before I told anyone about what had happened. One day I happened to tell a friend about it, and you know what he said? "So you say that Jake knocked the devil out of ye, huh!" —

Another good Methodist family in the Beckley Chapel membership was Mr. and Mrs. John O'Dell. We used to love to go to their home and had many good times there. Also, I remember one night at their home when we got a real good scare. We were sleeping upstairs. During the night I awoke to see a strange object in our room. It was something that was white as a sheet and in motion, fluttering furiously. I nudged Catherine and got her awake. She saw the same thing that I was watching, so I knew it wasn't my imagination! It was a gastly looking object, we could see it clearly by the light of the moon that was shining brightly through the window into part of the room and casting weird shadows into other parts of the room. Sometimes the white fluttering object would cease to move, but stood there quietly, not offering to go away. I wanted to get up and light the lamp, but my matches were in my trouser pockets which was closer to the weird object. Truth is, I was scared! I thought Catherine should get up and light the lamp! But she didn't have any matches handy, either. However, as we lay there watching the strange thing, we heard a most welcomed sound. A rooster was crowing! This meant that morning wasn't far away. Day break was a welcomed sight to behold! Soon we were able to see "by the dawn's early light," that the object wasn't anything to have been afraid of. Mrs. O'Dell, — bless her heart, — had thrown a sheet over an old fashion loom that was there. The fluttering of the sheet was caused by a breeze that had been coming through a window that was partly opened. Thus endeth my ghost story.

## A "HEN-PECKED" MOUNTAINEER'S BURIAL

He died at a "ripe old age," but many who knew the circumstances thought that it would have been most merciful and humane if he could have departed years earlier. What a life the poor man had lived. He did not belong to our church, but I knew him well and had great admiration for him as did many others.

A quiet, soft spoken little man that had never made a dishonest dollar in his life and possibly had never said an unkind word about anybody. He was cursed and beaten so many times by his huge wife that his life must surely have been a misery to him. I passed a short distance from his home several times in traveling the Circuit and almost always I could hear the hysterical screams and shouts of the poor man's wife as she would be displeased about something.

One day I came along just as she was throwing one of her vicious tantrums and saw her throw down about a quarter of a mile of rail fence that the man had worked for weeks to build around the side of a steep rocky hill. She threw it all down in about five minutes. Sections of the fence fell as though they had been dominoes set on edge close together on a table. You are asking, "What did the poor man say?" — Not a word! Not one single solitary word! — I wouldn't have believed it excepting for the fact that I saw it with my own eyes. My path ran close by the scene through the edge of a woods. I had been an unobserved witness to the whole incident!

The next time I was passing along that remote section of the charge, the old fellow was again building the fence around the side of the hill. I sat for some time there in the edge of the woods on my horse admiring him at his work. I wondered how I would measure up under his circumstances. I will not speak of the conclusion to which I came! I plead the fifth amendment!

However, when Mr. "Job," as I will call him, passed away, great crowds came on a hot summer day to attend his funeral and pay their respects. Everyone held this man in highest esteem, excepting, of course, the one who should have loved him the most.

When "Job's" casket was placed over the grave in the cemetery, his wife arose from her chair at graveside, and, going over to the grave, she leaned far over as though she had noticed something down in the grave. In a moment, as many looked on, she spat loudly into the grave. Both of her lips, upper and lower, had been bulging with snuff throughout the funeral. "Wall," she said, "it sure do look nice and cool down in th'ar!" I couldn't help thinking of what a surprise she might get sometime. It wouldn't be as "cool down in th'ar" as she thought.

However, I often think of that quiet little man. He was so soft-spoken and easy going, scarcely ever saying anything to anyone. He was so patient and long suffering! He was not a preacher in the usual sense of that word, but his sermons which were preached through the way he lived were of far more influence on my life than some of the so called great academic discourses that I had heard. They were great too, and doubtless would be very helpful if I could remember them! "Job's" sermons in action, however, have never been forgotten! It is so easy to forget what a person has said, but we don't forget quickly what a person has done.

#### RAMPS OR CARBON MONOXIDE?

"Russell, stop this car! The Carbon Monoxide fumes are terrible in here! We're going to be asphyxiated!" she said.

We had picked up a hitch-hiker whom we knew. He had been eating ramps and Catherine was being given her first experience of the scent! It was a cold day and the windows of the car had to remain closed. It was almost unbearable. I knew instantly what the trouble was and rolled my eyes at Catherine, and nudged her with my elbow, and tried every way I knew to quiet her, but to no avail. "Stop the car!" she insisted, "this is dangerous!"

I was so afraid that the friend we had picked-up would be offended. I rolled the glass down on my side, and speeded up the car. Catherine thought I was crazy. My thought was that if I could not quiet her without making mention of the real explanation



for the awful odor, the next best thing was to get home as quickly as possible. It was only about two miles farther.

However, about a quarter of a mile farther with Catherine still frightened about the fumes in the car, the man either came to his destination or sensed the situation in the car and thought it best to leave. I do not know which, but I hope it was not the latter.

Ramps, which resemble wild onions, grow wild in the mountains and are regarded as a good spring tonic! The Methodist Church in Richwood has an annual Ramp Dinner, a custom originated by my friend, the late Dr. A. E. Beckett, who went as pastor to Richwood in 1937, the year I came to the end of my pastorate in Nicholas.

However, if everyone in a group is eating ramps, there is no problem. If there is anyone present in a group that is not eating them, he will not stay long! Several times in the ramp season I have witnessed humorous things at Church in this regard. Someone who had been eating ramps would take his place in the pews only to have people all around him get up and move to another pew, and, if possible, to find a place near a window. —

Incidentally, deadly Carbon Monoxide fumes, of course, has no scent. If Catherine had only known this, it would have saved some anxious moments that day on the road to Canvas from Nettie.

## THE STORK LANDS AT THE PARSONAGE

It was on a cold frosty night in November, 1934, that we were alerted to the fact that the "stork" was now ready to land at our parsonage home! I sprinted across the field in the darkness toward the home of the late Mrs. Etta Ray Groves to get to a telephone to call Dr. Brown at Summersville and to insist that he come immediately!

Dr. Brown, after cross-examining me on the phone, said that I shouldn't be excited, and he would be out in the morning.

After one of the longest nights in history, Dr. Brown drove up in front of the parsonage. He got out of his car slowly and came sauntering toward the house as though he were just out for a morning walk and thought he would drop in to see how we were getting along. I was alarmed! Why didn't he run toward the house. Anyway, Dr. Brown was "cool-calm-and-collected." He had supervised the landing of the "stork" many times. He knew what it was about! I was glad somebody did; I didn't!

Later that morning neighbor ladies began to arrive at the parsonage to grace our home with their helpful and most consoling presence. Not knowing what else to do and not certain about what to talk about at such a time, I went out into the woodyard and began chopping wood. As I chopped, Mary Groves, commonly know as "Mary Alf," came along and stood watching. I kept chopping, not knowing anything to say to her except, "good morning," and I had already said that twice. After a while she said to me, "Well, I see you've decided to get in a few licks while the crowd gathers!" Then she laughed heartily. Then I tried to laugh! But as I recall, my laugh was a little muffled.

It so happened that I had time to get in more than a few licks before the "stork" came in for a landing. Dr. Brown seemed a little uncertain and finally asked if we would consent to have another doctor for consultation. The second Doctor also seemed uncertain. Then, in all seriousness, there came the boldest, most daring chance, that Catherine and I have ever taken! The nearest hospital was at Richwood and over most difficult roads. We wished that we were back among our families at the hospital at Weston, but that was a hundred miles! In desperation, we decided to go there, and in our old and most undependable car, we started over State Route Nineteen, to Weston. — I know we were not alone that day. God was surely riding with us!

However, we are most proud of our son, Dewayne, who was born in the General Hospital in Weston, November 7, 1934. We are pleased also that a few years later God called him to be a minister. Dewayne completed his college and seminary under difficult circumstances and serves in the West Virginia Conference

of the Methodist Church, which needs him, and countless other young men like him. It is, of course, my hope that Dewayne will become all of my "Might have beens."

It is inevitable that I would say at this point that Catherine and I thank God for both of our sons. God has called them both! One to be a minister and one to "That house not made with hands eternal in the heavens," where he doubtless has need of him for a ministry beyond our infinite minds to understand. Paul, who was born at Adrian, four years after we left Nicholas, was with us for nineteen years before he went away. He was a joy and inspiration and in many ways is still at work in our hearts having an influence upon our faith and devotion.

Dewayne married Miss Mary Virginia Settle, of Parkersburg and they have three lovely children who are the pride and joy of our lives, Paula, Sarah, and Mary Catherine.

## THE PREACHER AND THE MULE

Once while in a meeting at Mt. Zion at Nettie, a messenger came with word that a member was taken ill in the Wilderness and had requested that I come at once to see him, that it was very urgent. Someone took me in their car the eight miles over route thirty-nine to the parsonage at Canvas. From there I continued on foot to the home of Mr. Sam Dorsey, who lived about two miles from the parsonage, and borrowed one of his mules, as I had often done before. I had information from the messenger from the Wilderness that Hominy Creek, which I would have to cross, was throwing one of its rampages that day. I would need a mule to help me cross safely.

However, after I had ridden the mule down the long steep mountain toward the Wilderness and had crossed the raging little stream, I dismounted and attempted to tie the mule to a tree. I felt that it was much faster to go on foot the remaining distance. Often when I would go from the Promise Land to the Wilderness and would be expecting not to return for several days I would release the mule after I had crossed Hominy and it would return to its home. This time, however, it was different. I



would need the mule to return across Hominy Creek after I had completed my mission, which would only be about two or three hours. When I dismounted, the mule broke away from me and started running up and down along the creek on the Wilderness side and with me after him and trying in vain to catch hold of his bridle.

*"I chased him through the briars  
And I chased him through the brambles,  
I chased him through the bushes where  
A preacher shouldn't go!"*

But all was in vain. Just as I thought I had him cornered and was reaching for his bridle, he whirled and kicked at me and plunged back into the water and went on to his home, leaving me stranded in the Wilderness.

There came to my mind at that time the Old Testament story about Balaam<sup>1</sup>, who also had a lot of trouble with his mule. As between Mr. Balaam and his mule, it had appeared, according to the Biblical story, that the mule had been actually wiser than Balaam. Of course, this was a much different set of circumstances that prevailed with me and the mule that day at Hominy Creek in Nicholas, but I couldn't help wonder if it had happened again! Was I really a modern Balaam outwitted by a jackass? It might have been, for if I had conserved the energy that I wasted in trying to catch that mule, I could have made the journey much more easily. I would also have avoided multiple scratches and bruises that I had sustained in the incident. — There is an interesting sequel to this story that is probably more humorous than the part I've told to this point, but I will defer writing about this until at the end of the next section where it may be better understood in the light of another set of circumstances. —

## HOW TO CROSS HOMINY CREEK

After I had lost my mule, as explained in the previous section, I continued on my mission to the Wilderness. Upon returning to Hominy Creek I was faced with the problem of how to cross the

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1. Numbers 22;

raging stream and still have dry clothing in which to continue back to the meeting at Nettie, where I was to preach that night. I thought about this as I came down the mountain and by the time I had reached the water had thought of a solution.

My plan, which I put into operation when I arrived at the banks of the creek, consisted of taking off all my clothes and wrapping them around a stone, binding them securely with my belt and also using the sleeves of my shirt to tie them together. Then, taking hold of the surplus end of the belt I began swinging the clothes around my head, making like a hammer thrower at the track meet, finally letting loose of the belt and tossing my clothes across the water into the brush beyond. Then, diving into the water several yards above that spot, I began to swim, being carried down stream by the current. I came out on the other side of the creek near the spot where my dry clothing was waiting for me and was soon dressed and on my way up the mountain toward the home of Mr. Sam Dorsey.

I have thought about this many times and while I call this section, "How To Cross Hominy Creek," I don't really recommend it. It has too many hazards. It worked that time, but I was a little alarmed when I had time to think about what I had done. What if one should mis-judged the distance across the swollen stream; or what if one were off on his timing of the swing and release the bundle at the wrong instant and thus lose his clothes in the water! Anyway, I was back to the meeting in Nettie on time, but I never tried this again, and I do not recommend that you try it, either. —

As a sequel to this story and also to the previous section, I will mention that when, on my return trip I had laborously reached the top of the mountain on foot, — having evidently been outwitted by my long eared beast of burden, the Sam Dorsey mule, — and was passing the home of Mr. Dorsey, from whom I had borrowed the "critter." I saw that tricky beast standing there in the barnyard close to the road, with his foot-long ears in the alert position and looking at me as much as to say, "Well, preacher man, how do you like swimming Hominy Creek by yourself?"

Then he threw back his head and made as if he were watching an airplane in the sky, and began braying one of those long drawn out heehaw, heehaw, heehaw sounds, and I just knew that while he couldn't speak to me as Balaam's mule had done, he certainly was meaning to give me, — I started to say the "horse laugh," — but on second thought at least the "mule" laugh, which at that instant had about the same effect on me. I felt that that mule had actually taken up that position in the barnyard near the road so that he would be sure to see me when I had finished swimming Hominy Creek and then climbing a most high and rough mountain. I felt like picking up a rock and "letting him have it between the eyes," but decided against it. I only muttered, "Heehaw, heehaw to you too," and went on my way.

### A NARROW ESCAPE

One afternoon we were on our way to Macedonia church, which was located on the mountain above and to the west of Fenwick on State Route number thirty-nine. Driving rapidly toward the intersection where we were to make a left turn toward the church, I turned our car directly across the path of an on-coming truck that was facing us at good speed from the direction of Fenwick. Whatever caused me to do this is a mystery until this day. I must have gone momentarily to sleep.

However, to avoid hitting us, the driver of the truck, our good friend of many years, Mr. J. I. Dorsey, now of Rupert, West Virginia, turned his truck sharply to his right against a steep bank, turning the truck over on its side in the road. Fortunately, no one was injured, excepting the fact that a passenger in the truck with Mr. Dorsey, in trying to climb up through the window to get out of the truck, trampled Mr. Dorsey, hurting him more than the upset of the truck had hurt him. Catherine and our infant son, Dewayne, were with me in the car at the time. Considering the speed at which both the car and truck were traveling at the time of the accident, it is unthinkable that all of us could have come through the collision alive. It was only the split-second decision that Mr. Dorsey made that saved the day.



All of this came vividly to mind recently when we were on vacation and attempted to revisit Macedonia church. As we drove along, talking about the near serious accident that had occurred there many years ago, we suddenly realized that the old church was gone. We had driven past the place where it used to be. We had not heard that the old church had burned. Only a foundation stone here and there in the weeds marked the place where it had once stood.

We were pleased to see that a new Macedonia church had been built along the main highway almost at the spot where Mr. Dorsey turned his truck over to save us all. A stone from the foundation of the old Macedonia church was placed in the yard of the new edifice. It serves to symbolize, I hope, the transfer also of the spirit of the old church.

Many times, while serving as pastor of the Earl Charge, we were unable to reach Macedonia church except by way of Summersville, Muddlety, Craigsville and Fenwick. It was a long, long way around. There were a few times that we didn't make it. On those occasions the service would be conducted by a local preacher there, The Rev. Hill Jones, who lived on the mountain above Fenwick.

### STUMPING THE PREACHER AND OTHERS!

There were many humorous situations that arose due to my not having an answer to things that were said. However, I was not always the only one that was stumped. Following are a few of the delightful situations. I use the word "delightful" advisedly, for while some of the experiences were not pleasant to me at the time, they later were recalled with great delight.

At Nettie I had been invited to a home for dinner. I had never been there before and was not certain about the attitude of the head of the house, who was not a church man. Like so many families, the religion in that home was mostly in his wife's name. However, at the table following the blessing, the man looked across at me and said, "Now preacher, I am a-gon-a-tell ye'

like I tells all the preachers that comes here, 'just make yer-sef at home, where ye' ought ter' be!' "

I couldn't determine whether the man was really serious, or whether it was a "slip of the tongue." Since he didn't change his expression when he spoke, I assumed that he had said just what he had intended to say. I continued to fill my plate as though I hadn't heard what he said. His good wife had prepared a most wonderful meal, and as one might say, she had "gone all out," to have everything just right. I felt so humble and so unworthy that anyone should have gone to so much trouble for me. I appreciated it so much and hardly knew just what to say. I expressed my feelings in an awkward way by exclaiming: "What did I ever do to deserve this wonderful dinner?" I had intended only to convey an acknowledgement of my appreciation, and never thinking for a moment that my question would be answered. But instantly the man said, "Nothing! Not a thing! But you are welcome anyway!"

Later that afternoon, the man stumped me a third time with his attitude and remarks. We were sitting before the open fireplace in his home in company of his big black fox hound that was sleeping before the fire. The lady of the house was in the kitchen, or, as the Nicholas People might say, she was in "The other house!" Anyway, I finally said that I would have to be on my way soon and that if the man would call the family together we would have a chapter from the Bible and a prayer before I left. This was customary.

"Come in here," the man shouted to his wife, "the preacher is-a-gon-a-pray! and get this dang hound dog out of here! he ain't usen' to no loud prayin' around here and he might hurt somebody!"

Well, I was certain that the "dang hound dog" really had not been "usen" to any loud praying in that home, or to any other manner of praying, either. I may add, however, that he heard a prayer that day. For when Mrs. "Doe" tried to put him out, pulling him by the collar, the old hound only braced himself and

refused to leave the nice warm fire. The poor lady tried the best she could, and seemed so distressed over her failure. Meanwhile, the husband just sat there in his easy chair, leaning back against a sheepskin, and making no effort whatever to assist in the "excommunicating" of his dog. I was afraid to make any attempt to help the good lady for fear of getting into trouble with either the man or his dog, or with both! I regarded them both as of about equal danger! I believe, however, the man would have been the less dangerous in that he would have been too lazy to have attacked me.

Anyway, I told the good lady not to bother any further to put the dog out, that I wouldn't pray too loud and I didn't think the dog would mind. Up to this point in my experience at that home, I had been trying every way I knew to form a good opinion of the man of the house. But his refusal to help his wife with the "dang hound dog" was the "last straw." There were no "doubts" left in my mind to give the man the benefit of! — — —

It was not always the preacher that was stumped. One day the stewards of my church were stumped along with me. We had a campaign at one of the churches to put a fence around the cemetery. We went to a certain man for a contribution to help buy the wire. We were told that this trip would be in vain for this man had never been known to contribute to anything at the church. But we felt that this cause was a most worthy one and that he couldn't refuse. We asked the man for his donation. A pause of quite some length followed. We waited! Finally he spoke.

"Well now, the way I see this thing," he said, "there is nobody in the cemetery that will ever get out. And, there is nobody outside the cemetery that wants to get in. So you don't need a fence!" He would make no contribution. One of the stewards said to him, "you can't be serious! Think of the cattle and sheep and hogs that will be tromping around over the graves of your loved ones! Surely you wouldn't want this," the steward said. "What makes the difference," the man, replied, "they woun't know anything about it!"



As we walked away from the man in disgust, one of the stewards made the remark that, "someday this man will die. They'll call us to go up there and get out our mattocks and shovels and dig his grave. Then they'll be calling on us to act as pallbearers. I don't know about you fellows, but I got my answer ready now." As we walked on another steward asked me a difficult question that made it a kind of "double-stumping," for me that day. "Preacher," he said, "if this man should die while you are still our pastor here, what would you say at his funeral?"

"Well," I said, after some hesitation, "I don't exactly know. But one thing sure, I'd do everything I could to forget this day!"

However, as it turned out, fortunately for me, the man out-lived my pastorate in Nicholas. My successor on the Earl Charge had charge of the funeral! Some of those same stewards that had been with me that day, were present at the service. I don't know what crossed their minds, but I have a very good idea about it! Some of them had also been in charge of digging the man's grave. I can imagine that they possibly thought of how appropriate it would have been to dig the grave outside the fence in the cemetery! —

One night at Mount Zion at Nettie, the whole congregation was stumped as they had never been stumped before. The late beloved friend in the ministry, The Rev. Mr. E. B. Ware, and I were conducting our revival together. During the altar service, the boys kept running in and out of the church, slamming the door and disturbing the service. We had asked them kindly several times not to do this, but to no avail. We were then at the closing moments of the service for that evening and brother Ware told me that he would say a few words before I pronounced the benediction. He said that he was going to show me how to break up this running in and out, once and for all. The hymn ended and brother Ware began to speak in his slow and deliberate, but most kindly manner:

"Now my dear friends, you are attending our revival very well and we appreciate this. But we have been annoyed and

disturbed here with you dear young people running in and out and slamming the door. So-o-o, I will ask a special favor of you. Will you young men kindly not take your laxative tomorrow until after the evening service, so you will not be having to run out so much while we are in the service tomorrow night? — Brother Lowther, pronounce the benediction!"

Well, this broke up the running in and out at the revival and it "broke-me-up" too. I had to make about three attempts at pronouncing the benediction before I could get on with it without laughing. You would have to have known this dear minister, to have realized how humorous it was. He was always so very slow and deliberate in his manner, and most kindly and soft spoken. He took everyone by complete surprise. —

One of the most witty men in the Promise land was Mr. Allie Groves at Canvas. A most distinguished looking little man, always wearing an eight-inch, well trimmed, white beard and with bright eyes looking most alert at all times, he was a most delightful person with whom to be acquainted. He would win out on top in three out of every four battles of wit. He was a great talker, never wanting for something to say and never knowing just when enough had been said. If anyone came to visit him, he would sit up practically all night talking. Two young men from Summersville decided to test brother Groves out and just see how long he would talk. So, they slept and rested all of one day, and in the evening went to visit Allie Groves. They talked and talked and talked. Finally, at about four o'clock in the morning the boys became sleepy and didn't prefer to carry the experiment any further. One of the boys asked brother Groves if he had any beds. Brother Groves replied that, "Of course I've got beds!" Then the boy replied, "Why don't you sell them, you never use them?" Anyway, he showed the boys where they were to sleep and kept on talking as they got into bed. They said later that the last that they knew that night he was still talking, and they declared that when they got awake in the morning that brother Groves was sitting there close by their bed and looking them right in the eye and that when he saw that the boys were

awake he said to them: "Well now, as I was saying to you fellows when you went out on me! . . ." So the boys, after all their trouble had still not found the answer to their question of just how long brother Allie Groves would talk before he would give it up. —





*III.*

*IN THE WILDERNESS*

## FIRST TRIP TO THE WILDERNESS

On our first trip to the Wilderness we learned that there were some real reasons for naming that section of Nicholas, "The Wilderness!" It had probably referred originally, to a place in The Bible, but we felt that there may have been other reasons for the name. However, we went by way of Summersville and Hughes Bridge across old Gauley River to Mount Nebo on the old road that is now obliterated. We spent some time in the vicinity of the old iron bridge, which stood directly beneath the present magnificent high bridge that now graces the rugged landscape. At this point in our journey, two things impressed us and held us spell-bound and filled us with a sense of awe and wonder!

The first was the rugged cliffs of Gauley along the base of which our road approached the bridge. We were to hear many interesting stories, later, about the cliffs. One of particular interest was the story of how a pack of hounds, chasing a deer through the woods and brush above the cliff, were unable to alter their course when they came to the edge, and so went, to their death, together with the deer, over the cliff. A witness to that incident was a Mr. Hughes, grandfather of Mr. Willard Hughes, to whose home we were enroute on that first trip to the Wilderness. Grandfather Hughes, whom I never knew, had operated a ferry for years across old Gauley river. This had been many years before the building of the old iron bridge, with its noisy loose plank floor, that we used for four years in Nicholas. Both the old iron bridge and the ferry had played an important part in Nicholas History. Incidentally, mid-way in the river, plainly visible from the new bridge, and just about fifty yards or so above the bridge, is a large boulder. This used to be the gage by which Mr. Hughes, many years ago, determined the danger of Old Gauley. When the water level reached the top of this boulder, it was the warning signal not to try to cross with the ferry.

When I looked upon the great cliffs of Gauley, marveling at their rugged beauty and suggestion of permanence, I thought of the meaning that lies deep in the scriptural use of the word



"Rock," and of the hymns of the church in which it is used: "The rock that is higher than I<sup>1</sup>;" "The Lord Is my rock and my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge . . .<sup>2</sup>" ". . . Like the shade of a great rock in a weary land . . .<sup>3</sup>" "He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be greatly moved<sup>4</sup>." "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock.<sup>5</sup>" These and countless other passage of both Old and New Testaments use the word "rock" to convey attributes of faith in God's love, his power, and his protection. It also served to convey the idea of God's unchangeable nature that "From everlasting to everlasting thou art God"<sup>6</sup> through endless years the same. He is "The same yesterday, today and forever."<sup>7</sup> —

The second thing that impressed us here at Hughes bridge was the mad, rushing waters of old Gauley River, thundering down among the boulders beneath the bridge. We learned to love this river in all its furious beauty. As I looked upon it from the bridge that day, I felt that it was putting on some kind of special demonstration which it was staging in our honor. There were a few times during the next four years, however, that I felt that this river didn't like me very well! There were other times that I stood for long periods on the bridge watching its demonstrations of power and restlessness and feeling that in all of nature nothing is more fascinating. The river helped me many times — unwittingly of course — with my sermons.

However, as we continued on our trip to the Wilderness we were filled with awe and wonder several times. In fact, as I recall there were a few times that we not only had a sense of awe and wonder, but were downright scared! At one point, there was a boulder above the road on a steep bank; the boulder, about the size of a small house, was leaning so much toward the road that we

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1. Ps. 61; 2  
2. Ps. 18; 2  
3. Isaiah 32; 2  
4. Ps. 62; 2  
5. Mat. 7; 24  
6. Ps. 90; 2  
7. Heb. 13; 8

wondered if it was safe to pass! It looked as though it might roll into the road at any time. I stood looking at it for several minutes. And, wouldn't you just know it! I thought I saw it move. However, I was back there about thirty years later searching for it. It was still there, just where I had seen it on the first trip to the Wilderness.

At the end of the noisy bridge the road turned sharply to our left and angled up the side of the mountain over rocks and wash-outs that were unbelievably rough and dangerous. At one place there was the steepest and most difficult horse-shoe turn that I had ever seen. I used to feel most relieved when I had succeeded in rounding that turn on the way to the Wilderness. Sometimes I would make several attempts before getting up and around this steep turn, my old car, — the one I first owned when I went to the Earl Charge, a 1927 model Star, — simply not having the power to climb the hill. Sometimes I would fail completely to get up the hill on my own and would have to sit by the roadside and wait for help. At such times I would listen anxiously for the rattling and rumbling of loose plank in the floor of old Hughes Bridge, far below. This sound, when I would hear it, would suggest that help was on the way and would be there in a few minutes.

In 1964, while on vacation, we drove to Mount Nebo from Summersville over a new highway and bridge over Gauley. I stood on the new bridge looking up the river at the place where the old iron bridge had stood. Only one of its rugged stone piers remained at that time as a monument to mark the spot. I wondered if the thousands who travel that new highway would ever recall or remember at all that rugged trail to the Wilderness of years gone forever. One thing is fairly certain, I'll never forget it.

However, in 1968, while passing that way again, we crossed yet another bridge, — the new magnificent high bridge, that is 274 feet high from its foundation and 1396 feet long. Someone asked me what I thought of this marvelous bridge? I told them that I had been asked a similar question when I looked for the first time into the Grand Canyon. I had given an honest answer

then in a very few words, namely, "I don't know what to say!" With regard to the high bridge; the Summersville Dam, and the vast changes that have taken place, who could know just what to say? This marvelous feat of engineering may be taken for granted by those who are not familiar with the old iron bridge, the exact location of which, I am told unofficially, is now under ninety feet of water beneath the new high bridge. But to one who was familiar with the old bridge, Gauley Canyon and the surrounding territory, it is another story. As for this humble writer, I am spellbound every time I see it! I find myself wondering what would have happened if I had been a prophet and could have foretold all this that has happened, and I had met you one day on the old iron bridge and had told you that in time to come we would cross the river on a beautiful bridge that would be 274 feet high and 1396 feet long. You would have thought I was "pretty-far-out," and that you had better talk to Catherine about having me to see a psychiatrist! Maybe you will feel that this is "far fetched" but isn't it about the same situation with regard to many of the tenets of our Christian Faith concerning the future? We talk about a city, whose builder and maker is God, and eternally in the heavens, about houses not made with hands, — about immortality etc. If so many unbelievable things are done by our men of science; things which a few years ago we would have considered utterly impossible, how much more can God accomplish with the hearts and minds of men! We saw recently in the news that man with his science of surgery had succeeded in transplanting the human heart! Is it too much to believe and to have faith that our Kind Heavenly Father can, and will, bring us to eternal life, transplanting our souls from this imperfect to that all perfect realm?

While the old Nicholas landmarks, dear to the hearts of many, are passing from the scene, often leaving a lump in our throats as we watch them go, we would not have it otherwise. For we know that change must come to all things and that without change no improvement can come to anything. The only hope for our war torn world itself is that it will change! God only remains the



same, "Yesterday, today and forever."<sup>1</sup> "He is Alpha and Omega the beginning and the end."<sup>2</sup>

What has happened with regard to the bridge and Gauley River is a parable of human life. We too, as individuals, are changing from day to day. No man remains as he is. We are becoming better men, day by day, or we are becoming worse, as the case may be. It is to be hoped that all of us will understand and take seriously the admonition of the scriptural passage which admonishes that we are to "Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour . . ."<sup>3</sup> Then one day, perhaps much sooner than we think, the time will have come for our final change to be made, that change from the scenes of earth to "that bourn from which no traveler returns." —

Well, anyway, to get back to our first trip to the Wilderness; inquiring our way along and being lost two or three times, we finally came to the home of Mr. Alaska Dorsey, who was the Class Leader at Hickory Grove Church. We found the family in the edge of a woods about a quarter of a mile from their house, making molasses. This interested me very much, for while I had eaten molasses all my life, I hadn't the slightest conception until that day of how it was made. Later at another home I had an opportunity to assist in the process. I fed the cane-mill while an old mule hooked to the shaft furnished the power for the mill. I wondered why the faithful animal didn't get dizzy going round and round that way for such a long period of time. This was at the home of Mr. Isaac Dorsey at Buckhorn.

The Alaska Dorsey family greeted us warmly and almost from the moment we arrived we felt that we had known them for years. They dispelled many doubts and fears that we had with regard to the Wilderness people. We had somehow expected them to be distant and suspicious of us. To our amazement we were treated most cordially and told that the "latch string" would always be out for us at their home.

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1. Heb. 13; 8

2. II Peter 3; 18

3. Rev. 1; 8 21; 6

After a while, two more rays of the sunshine of friendliness appeared on the scene. The daughter, Gertrude and her boyfriend, Romeo Backus, returned from an educational meeting in Richwood. They were teachers in the public schools of Nicholas County. They were of great help to me later in the church at Hickory Grove. Romeo is an accomplished musician and played the old pump organ while Gertrude served as a teacher in the church school. Speaking of the old "Pump organ" at the church, I can remember that in some of the services we made it rather difficult for Romeo because we sang so many hymns. Pumping the old organ, especially on a hot day in July or August, wasn't too easy. It would be equivalent to walking several miles during one service.

Again and again as we continued on through the Wilderness, my mind kept returning to the Man From Nicholas, whom we had met at conference a few weeks before and who had said, "Nicholas people are the finest in the world . . ." I began to realize what he meant. Also, he had said, "An son, it's mighty rugged up there, mighty rugged!" I was learning very fast now what he had in mind. As a young man then, only twenty-one years old, and never having been away from home in my life, the Wilderness made quite an impression on me. I felt that it was a place where the finest people in the world lived in the world's most rugged terrain.

## A FRIGHTENING NIGHT IN THE WILDERNESS

Following instructions we had been given along the way, and being lost a few times, eventually we arrived at the home of Mr. Willard Hughes, near the Dixon Church, where we were to spend our first night in the Wilderness.

After all the friendliness and cordiality of the Dorsey's had been duplicated by the Hughes', we retired for the night, thankful to be among friends . . . . During the night, a storm arose with such fury as I had never heard! The wind came in sudden shocking gusts! It was like a prolonged series of explosions, each one of which I felt certain would sweep the house off its foundation!

While this continued for what seemed hours, we kept hearing a most shrill clanging noise which we could not identify. It kept up all night, making us most uneasy and disturbed! I arose several times and lit the lamp and would listen for other members of the family to be up and moving about. But evidently they were sleeping as peacefully as though nothing was wrong. It gave me confidence to know that they were not disturbed. However, I wondered how they could possibly sleep through all that noise! Could it have been possible, I thought, that they had been frightened and had left the house? I didn't hear anyone!

The sharp clanging noise continued. If Catherine and I had just been married, we might have thought that we were being serenaded, or "belled," as the Nicholas people would have called it. I felt that whatever the dreadful noise was, it certainly was doing its part to give us an introduction to the Wilderness. What an initiation this was, complete with humiliation. I had always taken great pride in the fact that I was such a brave soul! Now here I was frightened by a storm! I thought again of the Man From Nicholas. He had said that it was "Mighty rugged, mighty rugged!" But he had not mentioned anything about the possibility of being blown away!

However, morning finally came. I thought it never would. Time usually goes unbelievably fast, but under some circumstances time seems to slow to a standstill. It was Mark Twain who once spoke of "The sun bothering along over the Atlantic." Sometime ago, my grand-daughter, Paula, anxious for Christmas to come, said to me: "Minutes take their time don't they?" That first night in the Wilderness had seemed like a long long time. Minutes and hours not only seemed to take their time, it seemed to us that all time had ceased. It was a long night! I'll never forget it.

At breakfast next morning, Willard and Lyda seemed most amused at their little city guests, the young "parson" and his wife. They just laughed at us and told us that high winds on the mountain were common. Certainly they were nothing to cause great alarm. However, there were many times that the high



winds struck with terror to the hearts of everyone. An example of this occurred at the parsonage one night when the corner of the house seemed to bump up and down on the foundation during a terrific storm that root-walled trees and blew down rail fences for miles in every direction. Catherine and I, during the storm, wrapped our infant son, Dewayne, in blankets and pillows and stood for at least an hour near the chimney, holding him in our arms. We were certain that the house was in danger of blowing down. We felt that if we would have any chance at all to survive, it would be near the chimney. There were countless other times too, when we felt that the winds in the mountains was something to be alarmed about. Other occasions may be mentioned later in this little volume.

However, after breakfast next morning, Willard took us out to explain to us the mystery of the clanging sound we had heard all night during the wind storm. Believe me, I was "all ears." I wanted to hear this! It was a very simple explanation. One end of a wire was attached to a fence post in the yard. The other end was attached to the yard gate. Plowshares had been strung on this wire for service as weights to keep the gate closed. The wind had kept opening the gate all night and the plowshares had been closing it. What a furious conflict and struggle that had been. In other words, it had been an all-night battle between the plowshares and the wind over the issue of whether the gate should be closed or open. The plowshares had won the battle, but what a fuss they had made in doing so.

Several months after that time, when attending a "belling" at the home of Mr. Arthur Sebert near Hickory Grove Church, I noticed that one of the chief noise-makers being used was plowshares suspended on a wire and being struck with a hammer. The only noise-maker that I have heard that could equal this is the band-saw, carried on a piece of pipe or an automobile axle, supported by two men who served as carriers and with a third man beating the saw with a hammer! That will send you in search of your ear plugs! This noise can be heard for many miles, especially on a clear cold night when there is sleet on frozen ground.

When I read in the Old Testament what the prophet had to say about swords being beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning-hooks,<sup>1</sup> I know, of course, that his reference is to a time of peace on earth, which we all pray for; a time of real disarmament when implements of war will be destroyed and turned into something useful and helpful to mankind. However, whenever I hear the word plowshares, even from the Bible, my mind leaps backward in time to the front gate of the Hughes home in the Wilderness. In my imagination, I can still hear the clanging of plowshares in their struggle to out do, and prevail over the wind in keeping the gate closed. As the plowshares prevailed that night over the storm, may they prevail also in our stormy war threatened world. May the energies of men and science be turned to peaceful endeavor, that the Kingdom of God may come upon the earth.

#### THE CAT AND THE PREACHER'S CHICKEN

One of the most humorous incidents ever to occur on the Earl Charge took place at the Willard Hughes home, also at the time of our first trip to the Wilderness. The family had been expecting us, for the next day was the fourth Sunday of the month and my regular appointment at Dixon Church. Lyda, anxious to be a gracious hostess, which she always was, and also being familiar with the old story about all preachers being fond of chicken, had killed the fattest hen on the farm and had been preparing it at a table on the back porch at the time Catherine and I drove up. She came at once to greet us at the front door and had instructed her little daughter, Macel, to watch over the chicken. But, Macel, also curious to see the new preacher, forgot about the chicken and came slipping along behind her mother to catch a glimpse of him. In the excitement, it was quite several minutes before the chicken was thought of again.

Meanwhile, Macel's big tomcat took the opportunity to snatch a piece of the chicken and carried it under the house, where, of

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1. Isa. 2:4  
Mic. 4:3

course, he could enjoy his chicken dinner without ministerial interruptions! The humorous story came to light later at the table. Catherine, who did not know what had happened, when asked what piece of the chicken she would prefer, said that she would like the breast. Well, it so happened that this had also been the choice of old "Tom." The atmosphere was tense with mixed emotions of humor and dismay. No one could keep his face straight. The story just had to come out!

We have had many good laughs over this incident. Macel was so humiliated and disturbed over it. She was most embarrassed and ashamed to think that her cat should break one of the Ten Commandments, and to have done this terrible thing almost in the very presence of the minister. She finally was able to see the humor of the situation, but it wasn't easy!

### CIRCUIT RIDING DAYS RETURNED

While the term "circuit rider" generally refers to a previous period in our nation's history, to me it doesn't seem so very long ago. In fact during my pastorate at the Earl Charge, 1933-1937, I traveled as far on horseback as by auto. I owned an old car, previously mentioned, but there were only short periods each year in the summer and early fall that I could drive it. There were no hard surface roads in Nicholas at that time that touched upon the Earl Charge at any point. The mud was so deep that someone with a good sense of humor placed a sign at Mount Nebo, near the store and Post Office, then operated by Mr. Edmond Ramsey, and the humorous sign read: "Choose your rut carefully here, you will be in it all the way to Summersville."

I will possibly never forget the night that I reached the decision that I must abandon the idea of driving a car in the winter, but must secure a horse or plan to walk. I was driving home from the Wilderness alone. About a mile from Mount Nebo at King's Knob, the car came to a sudden stop. I thought at first it had "jumped" out of gear or that I had broken the drive-shaft, for the motor was still running smoothly. There was a vibration and in the dim light of the dashboard I noted that the



speedometer was registering. This confused me, for I couldn't at first understand how the motor could be running, the speedometer registering and still the car not be moving? I soon learned the reason. Both rear wheels had broken through the ice in the ruts and were spinning in the water, the weight of the car being held up by the rear axles buried in the mud! It would take a bit of doing to get out of this, for the car was so deeply buried that it would be impossible to place a jack under the bumper. In fact, the bumper was also buried partially in the mud.

Fortunately I remembered a trick one of the boys in the community had taught me. It consisted of removing the hubcaps and placing the jack inside the wheel. Then, by use of a tire-tool, or a mattock that was usually carried in the car, a solid place could be dug-out for the base of the jack. In this way the car could eventually be raised enough to place a fence rail in the rut under the wheel. This was a laborious task in the darkness, and had to be done on both rear wheels. When it was eventually accomplished and I was ready to go, I was most pleased. However, I drove only the length of the rails I had succeeded in placing under the wheels and broke through again. — And now, it became necessary for me to remember my last Sunday's sermon, which had something to say with regard to the control of one's temper! I didn't really say anything wrong, but as I recall I ask the Lord in my prayers sometime later to forgive me for what I had thought of saying in that predicament!

It was almost morning when I arrived home. I had learned my lesson the hard way. The Earl Charge was no place for an automobile. I knew it now! I should have known it many days before when I was advised with regard to the matter. I soon secured the use of a horse for the winter, as I will explain later, but not before a most humorous thing occurred.

### THE GENNY EPISODE

My search for a horse to ride the circuit led to possibly the most humorous incident of my time in Nicholas. It was one that caused laughter wherever it was told and it was told about

everywhere. In fact, after 35 years it is still being told there in the mountains.

It happened at the home of Mrs. J. J. Reynolds at Hickory Grove. We were at dinner and Mrs. Reynold's son-in-law, Mr. "Sam" McClung, said that he had heard about my need for a horse, and that he had something that was better than a horse which he would loan to me. It was a genny! He went on to tell of how sure-footed this animal really was and, while it was not too fast, it would take me safely wherever I needed to go.

I thought there was a mischievous twinkle in "Sam's" eye as he told me this, but I didn't know him very well and wasn't certain whether he was joking or not. So I told him that I certainly was glad that my transportation problem was solved. Of course, I had never seen a genny and didn't know exactly what "Sam" was talking about. He was aware of this ignorance on my part and of course this fact made all of his fun possible.

After dinner, the whole party started toward the barn to saddle up the genny so that I could be on my way to Buckhorn where I was to preach that afternoon. Suddenly from behind the barn there came the awfulest noise I had ever heard! I thought a lion had roared or maybe some other strange beast. I was startled and asked what that noise was? "Sam" now began to laugh loudly and said that it was the braying of the genny that I was going to ride. I protested loudly and started back to the house! I said that never in this world would I ride anything that could make a noise like that! Well, tears were flowing and sides were being held by all members of the party, and some laughed so hard that they couldn't stand up and sat down upon the ground!

It took a man like Walter Dooley at Jordan Chapel, previously mentioned, to put the finishing touches to the incident. Soon the story was going the rounds that I had actually ridden the genny to Buckhorn and tied it to a fence behind the church. During the service it began to bray. People were alarmed, thinking that Gabriel had sounded his horn and the judgment was at

hand. Many people were frightened to the point of repentance, flocked to the altar in the service and that a revival "broke out!" The truth is, however, I never rode the genny, although many times I rode a mule loaned to me by Mr. "Sam" Dorsey in the Promise Land, for the purpose of helping me cross Hominy Creek. I never rode the mule to any of the churches. There were two good reasons why I did not: First, I believe in starting all services on time. In riding to church on the mule, I would have been late almost every time, for that was the slowest "critter" I have ever seen. And yet, as told in another section, he certainly outran me when I tried to catch him one day, down by the river side! In the second place, I never rode the mule to church because of the jokes that would be made regarding that humble spectacle. I can just imagine some of the comments that would have been made. Imagine what Alfred Dooley, brother of the Man From Nicholas, would have said if he would have seen me riding in to Glad Tidings or Hickory Grove on a mule: "Well, well, men!" he would have laughed, "get a load of that! Here comes our little Balaam preacher man riding on his mule!" Alfred would have had some good humorous thing to say. It is a little hard to tell what he would have said. —

Incidentally, the first time I met Alfred Dooley, I was on my way to Hickory Grove to church. He said that he was coming over in a little while to church and when he arrived he would introduce me. "You go on over," he said, "they woun't know you're a preacher, but I'll tell 'em when I get there." — Alfred was a good friend. I thought a lot of him.

## A COLD RIDE

Mr. Arthur Sebert, who is, incidentally, father of Mr. Lowell Sebert, prominent laymen in the West Virginia Conference of The Methodist Church, then living at Mount Nebo, loaned me a horse which I rode countless miles in the four years of my pastorate in Nicholas. This wonderful animal seemed to understand the meaning of our travels together. He was obedient beyond comparison. He would leap the gullies, swim Hominy Creek and



go wherever I called upon him to go. Sometimes, I fear, in thinking back over the experience, that I wasn't always too reasonable in handling this wonderful animal. If there is a heaven for horses, and I certainly think there should be, this horse is surely there.

One fourth Sunday after preaching at Dixon, we started toward Buckhorn where I was to preach that afternoon. Sleet was heavy on the trees until they were bent low to the ground. The wind was strong and it was below zero weather. It wasn't a good day for either man or beast. I was advised all along the road to turn back, for there would be no one at church on a day like that. But I felt that it was my religious duty, being the pastor, to be at Buckhorn at the appointed time even if I were the only person there.

However, I was determined to continue on and in doing so I had a most frightening experience. Just after turning off the Hominy Falls road near the Elmer O'Dell residence, a large limb, bearing probably a ton of ice, was blown off a tree over the road and came near to hitting us. The wind was blowing so hard and it was so cold that I hardly knew at times where we were. But the old horse would lay back his ears, bow his neck and plod forward. He knew where we were and where we were going. We had gone there together many times. As I have said, if there is a heaven for horses, I know he is there now thriving in the greenest pastures.

When we arrived at the church I could see that there was no one there. Moreover, no one had been there recently. Snow was drifted across the door and there was no smoke coming from the chimney. The old leather shield that covered the rusty pad lock on the door was coated with ice. I rode on down the road to the nearest neighbor, the home of Mr. Samson O'Dell. I discovered when I started to dismount that I was frozen in the saddle and could not get off the horse. My legs were numb! I couldn't move them. The members of the family came out and took me off the horse and helped me into the house. Then, instead of me preaching to them, — which is what I had gone there to do, —

they started preaching to me. They thought I was crazy to have come out on a day like that. I remember that when I began to thaw out by the fire and started stinging and hurting all over, I thought they might possibly have a point. As the old time preachers might have phrased it, they almost had me under conviction.

Anyway, the trip seemed at the time to have been entirely in vain. In fact, as I have said, it seemed almost stupid. Yet I found out in time that it was not really in vain for two reasons. First, that certain people living in the community were impressed by the fact that a minister had gone out on a day like that, and came to the conclusion that there must really be truth in the gospel he preaches. They started to attend church.

In the second place, it had not been in vain because of the strength that I personally gained from the experience. In fact, the trip had been a very fruitful one, in the "long-run!" Come to think of it, that is how all our experiences are most accurately evaluated, that is, "in-the-long-run!" After thirty-five years it has become established that some experiences on my first pastorate that were apparently useless and in vain at the time, have turned out to have been most valuable. On the other hand, some experiences that were hailed as of great value have turned out in the perspective of time as being valueless. In fact, many experiences that were thought to have been important have been all but forgotten.

There comes to mind something that the Master once said relative to prayer, that is, that one is not heard for his many words.<sup>1</sup> This is doubtless true also in our dealings with each other. What we have done will be remembered and have influence long after what we have said is forgotten.

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1. Mat. 6:7

## CIRCUIT WALKING DAYS

Before securing the services of the wonderful horse previously mentioned, which was loaned to me by Mr. Arthur Sebert of Mt.

Nebo, I might have been properly called "The Circuit Walker," instead of the "Circuit Rider." The distances that I walked in serving the charge seem most impossible to me now. Those who are familiar with the territory and acquainted with the families who used to live there, may picture the situation. I walked once a month from Hominy Falls to Canvas in the Promise Land, going by way of Levasy, O'Delltown, the home of Mr. M. R. Groves, across Deepwell to the parsonage at Canvas. Later, when I became more familiar with the country, I found a near-cut from Hominy Falls to Canvas by way of the homes of John Nutter and Mr. Jake O'Dell, west of O'Delltown.

Another route I walked was from the Promise Land to the Wilderness by way of the homes of Mr. "Sam" Dorsey, Mrs. Maggie McClung and across Hominy and up the mountain to the home of Mr. Haymond Huffman. On this route I came out of the woods in the vicinity of what was then the Oak Grove School. Sometimes in crossing from the Promise Land to the Wilderness, I came by way of the home of Ira Groves; sometimes by the home of Mr. Rufus Dorsey, depending on whether I was enroute to Hickory Grove or Dixon church.

In climbing the mountain on foot toward the home of Ira Groves and carrying a suit case, on my way to one of the numerous Wilderness revivals, I can remember of dipping snow into my overcoat pockets. This will sound ridiculous to many who are not familiar with how steep that mountain really is and who never walked it in one of those Nicholas snows. Those who know that mountain and have knowledge of what the Nicholas winters are like, wouldn't think it strange if I had said that I dipped up snow in my shirt pocket instead of in my overcoat pocket.

Walking the circuit had its compensations. For one thing, it was good for the physical health, providing exercise that one now has to provide in some other way, such as by golf and bowling.

Then too, in walking the circuit one came into contact with numerous people whom one may never have known had he been driving the car or, for that matter, even riding the horse. Invaria-



bly as one became acquainted with the country and more confident in his sense of direction, he would seek near-cuts across the fields and through the woods. In doing this, one would meet many people who he might otherwise never have known.

## THEY TOOK ME IN

A memorable thing occurred once while walking the route from the Promise Land to the Wilderness, previously mentioned. I was walking this estimated eight mile route from the parsonage to Hickory Grove church on February 2, 1933. This date was later established by the fact that I was on my way to begin the first revival in that community. Friends had recorded the date of it.

Just as I passed the home of Mr. Ira Groves and was coming near what was then the residence of Dr. Charley Beam, I slipped and fell across my suitcase, injuring my right hip and back most painfully. Later that day, after what seemed hours of struggling along the road, I arrived at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Orval Green. They saw that I was in no condition to continue on and took me into their home. As I recall, I continued with them for several days. Anyway, from the condition of my clothing when I arrived, it was believed that I had possibly been rendered unconscious in my fall and had been laying for sometime in the road. I was literally covered with mud from head to foot. I mentioned that this had occurred on February 2nd., which was ground-hog day. Mrs. Green commented that I looked something like a ground-hog when I arrived.

However, it turned out to be a most fortunate day for me. It marked the beginning of a lovely family friendship that has continued across thirty-five years to this day. Catherine and I never go to Nicholas that we do not call at the home of the good people "who took me in!" It is like going back home to go there. They treated us like we were members of the family.

For several years during college and seminary days, we were unable to visit with the Green family and so, in a manner of

speaking, were out of touch except by the way of U. S. Mail. Then one day in Charleston, W. Va., I was recognized by one of the children, Miss Wanda Lee, who at that time was employed as a secretary for the Governor of West Virginia.

In the years that had passed, Wanda Lee had grown up and had changed. She had been only a small child when I had been at her home. I, of course, did not recognize her. However, I had not changed. In some ways it might be considered a pity that I didn't. When I stand before the mirror I can well understand that some changes would be in order. Of course, if you said this about me, I wouldn't like it! However, through Wanda Lee we were once again in touch with her family and countless loved ones in Nicholas. Wanda Lee, incidentally, married Mr. Cecil Stewart and they now live in Florida. The Green's have another daughter, Mrs. Wilma Lou McClung and two sons, Curtis and Kenneth.

Kenneth Green, who was then only about eight years old, came to me after church at Hickory Grove one day and invited me to go home with him for dinner. I was glad to accept the invitation. "Ken" and I had become good buddies and had many good times together talking about this most important thing in a man's life, namely, accepting Christ as personal saviour and becoming a Christian. "Ken" was most interested in this and he asked me many times the question, "How do you get to be a preacher?"

However, we both found ourselves in a very embarrassing position on that particular day, both preacher and laymen! The reason for the moments of anxiety that came to us on this occasion was that inviting me to his home for dinner had been entirely his own idea. His mother didn't know anything about it. But to be perfectly honest in the matter, I shouldn't really lay all the blame on to "Ken." It had more or less been my idea too. Mrs. Green is a most wonderful cook and anyone who wouldn't like to go there for dinner must be ill, or something. So, when "Ken" said, "Come on down to the house with me for dinner," I had replied, "What are we waiting for? Let us go right on down now to your house! I think it's a splendid idea!" His mother, whom we had

taken by surprise, forgave us that time. She did not, however, have to forgive us again for surprising her, because I got so much in a habit of going there when at Hickory Grove that it wasn't a surprise to her any more! She learned that she just as well expect me.

### BAYED BY HOUNDS IN A BRUSH HEAP

One day I was going on foot to Glad Tidings church in the Wilderness when, to my utter surprise, I almost went to the dogs instead. I mean literally. A pack of angry hounds attacked me and were intent upon having me for dinner!

Just after crossing Hominy Creek to the Wilderness side, a half dozen vicious hounds came at me from a cliff along the side of the mountain. I had gone that route countless times and had never encountered them. Anyway, there they were and I was faced with the problem of how to survive! There was no time to think it over, or to appoint a committee! I saw instantly that I had but one alternative to escape! Fortunately, someone had cut down a tree near my path. The tree had fallen down the hill with the top of the tree lying over a steep bank below my path. As the hounds rushed toward me, my only possible escape was in this tree top brush heap. I ran and jumped as far out into it as possible, my books, papers, and sermon notes which I had been carrying filled the air as I ran! As the hounds would circle the tree, baying loudly and trying to get at me, I simply tromped limbs down on them when they tried to get to me through the brush. I don't know how long this "dog-fight" continued. It seemed like an hour at least.

Finally, a stranger, carrying a gun, appeared from around the side of the mountain. He stood for some time looking at me and making no effort to call off his dogs. However, at long last the man seemed to be confident that I wasn't a ground-hog or a coon, or some other kind of varmint and so called his dogs and went back out of sight around the mountain. I have always thought that he might possibly have delayed in calling off his



dogs for he thought that they had treed a revenue officer who was out to arrest moonshiners! I don't say that this man was a moonshiner, but I will say that I saw smoke curling up from the cliff of rocks from which direction he had come to see what his dogs had treed! Maybe he was just a dumb mute!

Anyway, the stranger left with his hounds without saying a word to me. To this day I do not know who he was. I do not consider that I have missed very much in not being personally acquainted with him. After he had gone, with his demoniac canine companions, I spent some time trying to retrieve all of my notes that had filled the air as I went over the hill into the brush heap.

After the incident was over and the danger past, and I had climbed a ways up the hill away from the scene of the battle, I sat down to rest awhile and to think it all over. I thought of the Psalmist, and I wondered what he might have said in such a predicament as that. I think he would probably have said:

*"Thou preparest a tree-top before me  
in the presence of mine enemies!" . . .*

Another incident of the preacher doing battle with dumb animals occurred near the Beckley church at O'Delltown. I had spent the night at the home of Mrs. Georgia Ann Groves and her sons, Burns and Jimmie, and was on my way from there to church. About seventy-five yards from their house, I was attacked by a buck-sheep. The sheep didn't make as much noise in attacking me as the hounds had made. He simply came up quietly behind me and "used his head!" Anyway, this time I took refuge on top of a pile of fence rails near my path. I waited for the sheep to go away, but he wouldn't leave. Finally, I used my head too! I got hold of a piece of fence rail about the size of a good ball bat and this evened things up between the two contestants. At first the sheep wasn't convinced that we were now on different terms than a few moments before. He decided to try again. But after this experience, he realized that, after all, it might be much better

for him to give up the fight than to suddenly contract softening of the brain! Anyway, I was late for church and I was a long time hearing the end of that! It was such a funny thing, everybody laughed about it.

## LOGGING IT TO CHURCH

It was a real treat and a "joy ride" indeed when, upon some occasions, Mr. Okey O'Dell would take us to church on his log truck. As the truck would roar through the deep ruts, mud would fly in all directions. There were no fenders on the truck and the mud would literally splatter everyone on board, which was usually about ten or twelve people.

When riding on the truck and holding a lantern, the lantern globe would be covered with mud, until one could scarcely see whether it were burning. Of course the lighted lantern was not needed for light on the back of the truck, but it was used there to keep your hands warm during the ride.

However, when we arrived at the church and stood for awhile around the old burnside "pot-bellied" stove in the center of the floor, the mud would soon dry. We would then brush each other off and look as presentable as possible before beginning the service of worship. We all felt that we could do a lot of brushing with the energy we saved by not having to walk the two or three miles to the church. When we walked, we all wore four-buckled artics. We would take one step forward and slide back about three-fourths of the distance we had taken in our stride. I figured one day that it was about two miles to the church in dry weather and about three and a half miles, or more, in the mud.

I think about all this when I see people now who consider a parking lot only a half block from the church as being too far to walk. I heard a man not long ago excuse himself from going to church one morning because his daughter had the car. The man lives only two city blocks from the church. Jesus' disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, were willing in spirit, but the "Flesh was weak." With this man, the opposite is evidently

true, he is strong in the flesh but he has no spirit! His spiritual batteries are all the way down! One feels most awfully sorry for this man. It will be most difficult for him later on to "Come to himself," as the prodigal son, for he will be so "far gone" by that time that there will be no "self" to come to. Apparently the man is already "gone." He just isn't there anymore. The flesh remains strong, but no spirit! If he is to "Grow in Grace and in the knowledge of God,"<sup>1</sup> he had better get started. It may be later than he thinks!

In speaking of Logging it to church, and walking to church, there comes to mind something that Mrs. George O'Dell, commonly known as Aunt Bett, used to say, "Going to church is a case of 'need-pushity'." This was a strange word that she used, but if you knew Aunt Bett, you would get the message. Going to church was one of the most urgent matters in her life. In four years that I had the honor to serve as her pastor, she was never absent from any service at her home church, Hickory Grove. When the revivals were held at Dixon, she would walk approximately eight miles each day to attend both morning and evening services. In other words, she made two trips each day from her home near Hickory Grove to Dixon by way of Mouse Creek. Those who are familiar with Nicholas know how far that really is! Someday when you would like some exercise, drive over to Hickory and leave your car and try that walk across to Dixon! Imagine that it is snowing and the wind is blowing. You'll see what I mean.

To Mr. and Mrs. George O'Dell, every day was "The Day The Lord has made."<sup>2</sup> It should be a day of Thanksgiving. The night that Mr. O'Dell's barn burned, some one heard him say: "How thankful I should be!" When asked about this he said, "I mean that I should be thankful that it isn't worse, it could have been my home!"

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1. II Pe. 3; 18

2. Ps. 118; 24



## DON'T DROP THE BABY

It was at the Dixon church. My first Christening service was in progress. The whole congregation was ill at ease and some were alarmed!

"Oh, he's a gona' drop the baby!" someone whispered fearfully as the child was placed in my arms.

I heard this comment and was slightly irritated by it. "I'm not even about to drop the baby," I thought to myself! But as I tried to place the child in proper position for Christening, I encountered difficulties that I had not anticipated. Moments later I also had some feeling that I might possibly drop the child. It wasn't the dear little baby's fault that I was about to drop her. She was cooperating beautifully. She even offered to hold my glasses! Also my ritual!

It was at Dixon, Mr. and Mrs. Willard Hughes were presenting their lovely infant daughter, Mattie Rae, for Christening at the altars of their church. I was not experienced in administering this sacred rite. Not only was it the first Christening on the Earl Charge, but the first of my entire ministry. While this was a most beautiful and sacred rite, surely there wasn't anything difficult about the technique. I had seen the old Methodist pastor back home do this countless times. It had seemed so simple and easy that I hadn't bothered to give any thought to anything other than the ritual and the sacred meaning of the service of Christening.

However, like my first wedding, previously described, I soon learned that there is more to the ministry than being able to preach. I learned so many things the hard way. However, the congregation in general and my wife in particular, were so relieved when finally Mattie Rae was safely back into the arms of her father. I had been so awkward in administering the Rite. I would surely give some serious thought to techniques as well as to the sacred meaning of Christening before I ever tried it again.

Mattie Rae, incidentally, is now the wife of Mr. Don Thompson of Kanawha City. The Thompsons have two lovely children,

Lynn Kristie and Lois Ann. Mr. and Mrs. Hughes were the proud parents of three other lovely children, Macel, Iva Lou and Doris. I am fond of them all, but understandably I am a little partial to Mattie Rae.

## TALK ABOUT CAR TROUBLE

This section of my account of things that happened in Nicholas, will be of interest mostly to the men who know about automobiles and are able to understand the peculiar things that happened. I came into possession of a 1929 Model A Ford. This car was like some members of the church, it had to be pampered before it would serve! It had the strangest ailment and if you have any doubts about the story I am about to relate, ask Mr. Lowell Sebert, one of the leading laymen of the West Virginia Conference of The Methodist Church, now living in Lewisburg. He will remember it! I called on him and others in the Wilderness time after time to help with the peculiar old car.

The old Ford had a cross-member broken, which is the part of the frame that supports the weight of the front of the motor. Since the cross-member was broken, the front of the motor fell about four inches. This made it a problem to "crank" the engine, because the crank had to be inserted into the motor through a hole in the frame. But, since the motor had fallen four inches, it was out of line with the hole in the frame and the crank could not be placed. The starter on the old car was broken and the car had to be "cranked" all the time.

In order to start the motor, it was necessary to crawl under the car and place a jack under the front of the motor and raise it four inches. I would then be able to insert the crank and start the engine. When I succeeded in getting it started, I would then drive off the jack about the length of the car and park to go back to retrieve the jack from the road. Often while I was retrieving the jack, the motor would die. The whole painful process had to be repeated. I learned eventually to carry a brick in the car to lay on the gas feed to keep the engine going at good speed until I was ready to drive away. I must have driven the old car a year in

that condition. It was going to be an expensive repair job to have the cross-member replaced.

Finally, one day the old car gave up completely as we labored through the deep ruts near the Sebert Home at Mount Nebo. Lowell and his brother Lewis, Emmitt Dooley and possibly others went to work on the car there in the freezing mud. The drive-shaft was broken. It took a long time to fix it. The fellows built a fire by the side of the road and took turns working and warming. It was not the first time they had helped me out of a difficult situation and it was by no means the last time.

Speaking of the old 1929 model A Ford with its peculiar ailments, reminds me of a humorous incident that I would like to share with you. It occurred early one frosty morning in the fall of 1934. I was on my way to the Annual Conference at Wheeling. As I came at good speed around a sharp turn on Powell's Mountain, I saw a large yellow sign: "SLOW — MEN WORKING!" A group of men had gathered about a fire along side the road. When I saw them, I realized that I was going too fast. I threw on my brakes, but alas! I had no brakes! The brake pedal fell to the floor and the car, instead of slowing down actually seemed to speed up. Realizing the danger they were in, the men who had been standing around the fire by the side of the road scattered in all directions. The most of them went over the hill into the brush, coat-tails flying in the wind. They were no longer "SLOW — MEN WORKING," they were transformed into "FAST MEN — RUNNING." Serious as this was, I could not help laughing. However, I was able to place the car into a lower gear and to slow down. It was not too soon, for I would never have been able to make the next curve. — The moral of this story is that you had better have in mind at all times the answer to the question as to whether you can stop! This applies to lives in a most real way. The best thing to do is to be temperate in all things while you can.



## MOST MEMORABLE FUNERALS

"There has been a mistake! We've dug the grave too small," said the excited workman, as the people gathered for a funeral at Dixon. "I wouldn't have had this to happen for anything in the world," he went on, "but it wasn't our fault!"

The excited workman went on to explain that the vault that was to be placed in the grave had been late in coming to Dixon, due to road conditions and other matters, and that the workmen had mis-judged the size of it.

"There is only one thing to do," the man continued, "you'll have to prolong the service to give us time. It'll take quite a while; its solid rock down there. We'll have to use dynamite!" —

However there was held that day, at old Dixon church, the most memorable funeral that I have ever conducted, and I have held three hundred and forty-two that I have record of. Several were held before I started keeping a record. We did our best to prolong the service as the workmen struggled hurriedly to prepare the grave. Looking out through the clear windows of the church into the cemetery as the service continued, we could see them working with all their might. Mid-way in my sermon, the first blast shook the windows and the church trembled. This is understandable to those who know that Dixon church is built on a strata of rock which continues beneath the cemetery nearby in the church yard.

After I had done my part to prolong the service, doubtless saying many unnecessary things, a quartet continued with its part. The men sang many hymns, among them, there was one which they sang over and over. I shall never forget it, but will forgo mentioning the title of it here. Until this day, the singing of that hymn has most unfortunate and extremely unhappy connotations. As the quartet continued to sing this hymn over and over, additional blasts in the cemetery rattled the windows of the church.

There were other factors that made this a most memorable funeral. It was the funeral of a young man, Mr. James Boyd

Hughes, who had succumbed from an illness which, only brief weeks before, I had miraculously recovered.

The funeral of Mr. Hughes was most memorable also from the standpoint of the unity of sympathy on the part of the congregation for his young widow, an expectant mother, Tereasa, Dorsey Hughes. If ever the hearts of all the people, without exception, literally ached for anyone, it was for Tereasa that day.

James Boyd's funeral was also memorable in that it was the first funeral I ever held in Nicholas. I had conducted a few funerals as a local preacher prior to going to my first charge, in fact, one funeral at the age of sixteen. However, this first funeral in my first charge was the most memorable of my life for the reasons that I have mentioned and others that I could go on to describe.

Incidentally, Catherine and I had the good pleasure many times later of visiting with Tereasa, at the home of her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Rufus Dorsey. We felt that Tereasa's strength and courage which was admired so much was a credit to the Christian home in which she had been raised; a home where the children were taken to church, not sent, and taught to pray and to have faith that ". . . In everything God works for good with those who love Him."<sup>1</sup> —

A second memorable funeral which, because of the unusual circumstances connected with it, lingers in my mind and will likely never be forgotten. It took place in the Hickory Grove community.

A member of one of the churches in the Wilderness, Edith Corbett, had died in a hospital at Richwood. Her body was to arrive at an early hour in the afternoon at Summersville. The message that I received at the parsonage was that I should meet Mr. Emmitt Dooley there to receive the body and take it to her home near Mount Nebo. The reason for this unusual state of affairs was that Mr. Dooley owned a truck that had special high

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1. Romans 8:28

wheels for getting through the mud. His truck would be more likely to get through than any other conveyance available at the time.

What a solemn trip to the Wilderness this was! The most of the time we drove along through the mud, saying nothing, but praying silently that we would get through. We hung up several times in the vicinity of Blacks Chapel School, and again and again in the section near Gilgal Church. However, at long last, and by the aid of several jacks carried in the truck and an abundance of fence rails along the way, we arrived just after dark at the home of the deceased.

Friends had already gathered for the Wake. I had never attended a wake and could scarcely believe it when people began to sing. One choir, or quartet, would sing for an hour or more then they would be relieved by others who had arrived in the meantime. This would keep on through the night. This was most interesting to me. I remember that I spent the night, listening to the singing, and thinking over the eulogy for the deceased that I would give at her funeral the next day.

### OH MY ACHING BACK — A MIRACLE AT DIXON

One morning during a most exciting revival at Dixon, the old log church at Bruce, dear to the hearts of many wonderful people, a miracle occurred.

Mr. J. R. G. O'Dell, commonly known to everyone as "Uncle Grant," had been working in the woods and had injured his back most painfully. His back gave him constant pain and there was no position in which he could be comfortable. He was stooped far over and walked only leaning forward on his cane. Sometimes he used two canes and every step was a misery to him.

On this particular morning, he struggled forward and took his place in the "Amen Corner," which was located to the right of the pulpit. There, with the help of "Aunt Laura," his good wife, and others, he settled down to enjoy if possible the service.



During the testimony meeting, which was always a regular part of revival services at that day and time, he struggled to his feet to speak to the congregation. By this time, however, the spirit of the meeting had developed to the point that several people were on their feet at the same time seeking an opportunity to be heard. Someone started a hymn. Others joined in the singing. It was not possible for Uncle Grant to speak, but he remained standing, leaning forward, bracing himself on a cane in one hand and with the other hand on Aunt Laura's shoulder. During the singing, Aunt Tennie Dorsey began to shout. Others did the same. Soon there were some at the altar praying; some were singing; some were trying to give their testimony and all at the same time.

May I hasten to add at this point, that I do not mean to cast any reflection whatsoever on the service that was then being held. The members of the congregation were most sincere in their religion and in their means of expressing it. They had an experience of faith and hope and love in their hearts that meant everything to them. While we would not express it in the same ways today, nevertheless, that same experience of faith and hope and love must be ours also if our religion is going to mean anything to us. As I see it, they had something to sing, and shout, and testify about!

However, while the service continued, Uncle Grant suddenly started toward me, crying and laughing all at the same time his tears falling to the floor. He put out his hand as though to shake hands with me. Others were crowding around and bumping against him. He appeared most unsteady on his feet. I, in the excitement of the service threw my arms around him, forgetting for the moment about his painful injury! As I looked over his shoulder at Aunt Laura, I saw terror written all over her face! I suddenly realized what I had done and I too was horror stricken! I was so scared that I was shaking all over.

I made as if to help Uncle Grant back to his pew, but to my amazement, and the complete surprise of everyone, he stood up straight and started walking about, obviously in no pain whatever.

He abandoned his crutches and walked the two or three miles home following the service.

For my part, there had been no intention of attempting to heal Uncle Grant. I had, in fact, forgotten for the moment that he was injured. I would not for anything have done what I did if I had remembered about his injury.

My thought with regard to healing is, and has always been, that all healing is divine, whether it is from medicine, or surgery, or — as in the case of Uncle Grant, — a miracle. Could anyone who has been ill or injured, and who has recovered from his illness or injury possibly say that God had nothing to do with his healing? God works through our doctors and nurses and hospitals to bring healing to our physical bodies and to our minds; and through faith, hope and love his Holy Spirit brings healing to our souls.

#### A LETTER AND A LAMP

Among valued tokens of remembrance of Dixon church, is a letter written by the late Mr. J. R. G. O'Dell, in his seventy-eighth year and a lamp made especially for me by Mr. Orval Green of Mount Nebo.

The letter tells a fascinating story about the first Dixon Church that was there in Nicholas long years before the log structure that I knew so well. The old Dixon was used until about the time of the Civil War. The following is quoted from the letter of brother O'Dell, which tells an interesting story:

"The first one, (Dixon Church), was built by the M. E. People near the Andrew Dorsey Place. This church was burned down about 1860, when "Dad" Dixon as he was called was pastor. He was an aged man at this time. On a Sunday morning when the people came to service it was burning. They stood around their beloved old Temple with tears in many eyes. — As the ridge pole slowly sank, "Dad" Dixon lifted hand for silence and offered a fervent prayer. He prayed that the one who had fired their church might be bowed over as their roof tree was then bending. Inside of a year, this suspicious character failed in health and became bowed. This affliction grew on him until at

last he would move along on all fours like an animal. Dixon Chapel was rebuilt about 1865. It was built of hewn logs. In 1869, the people and their pastor, Rev. Smith, weather boarded and painted the church on the outside." — — —

In 1941, I was invited to return to Old Dixon to preach the last sermon in the old long edifice. It was a lovely day, renewing old acquaintances and reminiscing. Yet there was a tinge of sadness in all our hearts as we knew that this was to be the last service in old Dixon. It was to be razed the next day.

Many pictures were taken. But there is a picture in my mind that is more magnificent than those taken on this memorable occasion. It is a "moving picture," filled with life and activity! People are going and coming in all kinds of weather and on all kinds of occasions. There are happy times as tables are set under the trees in the church yard and food is prepared and families with smiling faces all gathered round. There are sad occasions, as the solemn processions one after another across the years, proceeded from the door of the church to the little cemetery, where rests all that is temporal of loved ones who have gone to "That house not made with hands eternal in the heavens."<sup>1</sup>

The next day, as the demolition of the old church began, one of the workmen, Mr. Orval Green, of Mount Nebo, who knew how much the old structure had meant to me, thoughtfully secured a piece of oak board from beneath the pulpit and from it he made a beautiful lamp and sent it to me. It is one of my most valued possessions, having a symbolic meaning that is quite beyond words to express. It has a prominent place in my study along side another lamp, this one an oil lamp, spoken of earlier in these pages. Somewhere it is said that "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."<sup>2</sup> With regard to these lamps, it could be said that the lamps themselves, in a spiritual sense, are "words" to my pathway. As symbols, they have so much to say to me of people and experiences of worship that did so much to make my life meaningful and give it a sense of direction. — — —

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1. II Co 5:1  
2. Ps. 119-105



I used to refer to Dixon as my church on the solid rock foundation. Literally, it was! The strata of rock upon which it was built, outcrops only a few yards from the church, forming a cliff. There is a cave under the overhanging cliff below the church that is large enough that it once served as a barn. Protection for the horses could be found there while church was in session. In fact, the cave doesn't lack too much of actually being under the church. The church, however, is in reality, built upon a solid rock foundation. —

Speaking of the cave at Dixon that was used as a barn reminds me of another cliff of rocks, and cave, near Mount Nebo that was actually used for many years as a church! This story was told to me by Aunt Bett O'Dell, and refers to the time of her grandparents. Church and Church School were held under the cliff for years until the churches of the community were constructed. Aunt Bett remembered that as a child she had gone there to what they used to know as Sunday School. — I was thinking about this recently when I visited a most modern educational wing built on to a beautiful stone church. The pastor was giving me a tour of the building and pointing out the most wonderful equipment that it has. It is complete with the most luxurious furnishings, simply beautiful and comfortable beyond words. The pastor went on to tell me a sad story, a story that is hard to believe. He said that, while his church has all the equipment that one could ever hope for, that it isn't used! Only two small classes, consisting of pre-school age children come. What a contrast this is! One generation having no building but a cliff, or cave, but attending every Sunday, but another generation having everything and not caring anything about it! It is evident that many people, having been caught up in the web of our modern spiritual apathy must really believe that God is dead!

#### THE SHEEP-SHED SCHOOL BUS

"What in the world is that?" I asked Mr. Hughes, who came along just as I was looking at a curious little building with a glass window in it out near the orchard.

"Oh, that!" he said, obviously amused at my curiosity. "Well, sir, you would never believe it, but that is a school bus!"

"A school bus?" I asked, turning to look at him to determine if he seemed well that day.

"Well," he continued, "I mean it was a school bus; the first one around here. Of course, as you can see, it is a sheep shed now!"

I learned that this curious little structure with the big glass window had once been mounted on a farm truck and used as a bus, transporting young people from that area of Nicholas, to Summersville High School. It brought to memory the courage and determination Nicholas people had in the matter of securing an education. I thought of the days before even that little improvised bus was available of how they walked great distances in an effort to secure an education. Neither snow, sleet, wind or rain, nor sub-zero temperatures stopped them nor chilled their enthusiasm.

I was so interested in the former school bus, now used as a sheep shed, that I took a picture of it. When the color slides were developed, I was surprised to see that there had been a sheep in the bus looking out through the window. I had not noticed it at the time I took the picture, but there he is, looking out at me as much as to say: "Well, do I remind you of something?"

In fact, the sheep in the school bus did remind me of something; it reminded me of the little poem familiar to everyone, "Mary had a little lamb, its fleece was white as snow and every where that Mary went the lamb was sure to go. It followed her to school one day . . ." and so on. However, I suggest we use poetic license and change the poem and have it read in a way that would be more appropriate to the situation in Nicholas at the time the bus was being used. I would have it read: "Macel had a little lamb, its fleece was white as snow, and everywhere that Macel went, the lamb would like to go, but it couldn't follow her to school one day; the mud was too deep! . . . Macel could hardly

go herself!" On second thought, I had better leave the poetry to someone else.

Oh well, there is far more truth than poetry anyway in the memories occasioned by the sight of the little improvised school bus-sheep-shed!

There is an interesting sequel to this school bus story. Miss Macel Hughes, one of the passengers on the bus, then a student at Summersville High School, married the bus-driver, Mr. Blume Backus, who now operates the store and Post Office at Mount Nebo.

I do not know how much the Board of Education of Nicholas County paid Mr. Backus for driving the improvised bus, but I can tell you this, no one ever heard him complain about it. This is where good fortune really began to smile on him, and on Macel, too!

#### "LET US BAPTIZE THE PREACHER ON HIS BIRTHDAY"

On the 25th of January, 1934, a party was held in my honor at the mountain home of Mr. and Mrs. Hershal "Dick" Nickell, on Mouse Creek in the Wilderness. Their home was located midway between the Hickory Grove and Dixon churches. It was a day to be remembered.

After a fine birthday dinner which Gladys had prepared, the men walked out on the porch, laughing and joking and having a wonderful time. I was enjoying it thoroughly and not suspecting in the least that any practical joke was planned with me as the victim. Little did I know that I was to become the star player in the comedy that was about to be staged. The entertainment that was to follow was accompanied by hilarious laughter that echoed in the mountains and will long be remembered in those communities. It is deeply lodged in the memory of the Circuit Preacher, who will likely never forget it.

In a little while, "Dick" Nickell became interested in my glasses as the men visited nearby and asked if he might try them.



I took them off and handed them to him, not suspecting that this was a part of a plot. Just at the moment that "Dick" had my glasses safely in his hands where they would not be broken in the scuffle that was to take place, the arms of big John Dorsey closed around me from behind in a "bearhug" from which there could be no possible escape. At that moment someone shouted:

"Alright men, we've got him! Let us baptize the preacher on his birthday!"

I had heard many times of pranks and practical jokes played on teachers and preachers by men of the mountains and I had no other idea than that they intended to do just what they said. I was to be baptized that day in the chilly waters of Mouse Creek in the name of John Dorsey, "Dick" Nickell, Orval Green, Grover Thornton, Alonzo Dorsey, Elmer O'Dell, Bennie Huffman and others who were present on that memorable occasion. I put up a pretty good fight for a few moments, but soon realized the futility of fighting. Some of the men had hold of my feet; some had me by both arms, and the bearhug of big John Dorsey continued. Why try to get away from those odds? I realized that the best thing to do was to conserve my energy for I would need it to get out of the water.

They took me out to a deep hole of water that was then just below the ford in Mouse Creek, and they began swinging me out over the water, and as they did so, they counted in unison: "One . . two . . th . . ." Then an excited voice broke in:

"Wait men! wait! hold it! hold it!" The men stopped swinging. I began feeling a ray of hope now. Someone was going to defend me, I thought! The voice continued:

"Now it's not right to throw a man in the water without at least giving him a chance to speak. This man's a preacher. Now then, I suggest we let him preach! What have you got to say to that?"

Everyone agreed that I should be given a change to talk and to say anything I wanted to say. "Well," I said, "If I'm going to have to go into that cold water just because it happens to be

my birthday, I'm sorry I wasn't born in July or August!" That is all I could think of to say. Everyone laughed loudly, and clowned around for quite some minutes. One of the men said we should have a speech and suggested that we have volunteers for it. One of them called attention to the fact that they hadn't read the ritual. Some one suggested that I loan them my book.

Well this went on for quite a long time, and finally they decided that they had better forget about the book, and the ceremony, and all of that, and just simply get on with the most important part, which was the immersion! With this they began swinging me again over the water and counting in unison: "One . . . Two . . . Three . . ." And on the count of three they threw me, to the side of the hole of water where I landed, as they knew I would, on my feet on a sandbar. I was most delighted of course, and was soon back up in the road again joining in the laughter. I had been immersed once in 1926, and was about to be again in 1934.

#### WHY THEY LAUGHED AT THE PREACHER'S TEXT

The congregation laughed loudly. This startled me and led to some very anxious moments. I was use to the congregation bursting into laughter at times during announcements after I had made some humorous remark. At other times even during the sermon when some humorous illustration would be made, the people would laugh. But this was different. I had just quoted the scripture that I had chosen as my text! Never had they laughed when I quoted the scriptures. It almost frightened me!

However, the reason for it all was soon forthcoming. On my way to church that day, I had accidentally ripped a large hole in the seat of my trousers while crossing a fence. I had no change of clothing with me, or for that matter none at home that was adequate to wear to church. I was not like Naaman in the Old Testament story, who, when he went to see the Prophet Elisha, took with him "Ten festal garments,"<sup>1</sup> or as I would say, ten suits of clothes.

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1. II Kings 5:27

Mr. "Dick" Nickell had secured a large safety pin from the home of his aunt Lizzie, and with this I had mended my trousers sufficiently that I could go on to church. Two other men joined us enroute, and were laughing and having "a barrel of fun" out of the incident. I laughed also, and told the men that this was the first time I had had a safety pin in my pants since mother had placed one there twenty-one years before!

Upon arriving at the church I was greatly handicapped in the matter of getting around to shake hands with everyone before the service as I usually did. I did not realize that anyone at church, excepting the three men, knew anything about the accident. But the word had spread by the whispering route and everyone present knew about the hole in the back of my trousers and the big safety pin.

However, the moment I quoted my text, everyone present burst into laughter. The text I had chosen for that service was, "Therefore, forgetting those things which are behind, let us look forward! . . .<sup>1</sup>" I knew then that everyone present knew of my difficulty. I laughed too. A sense of humor must surely be one of the greatest of all the gifts with which The Heavenly Father has endowed us.

## PREACHING IN OVERALLS

"That is ridiculous," I said to Mr. Dooley, who had just offered a pair of new blue overalls free of charge, compliments of his country store, providing I would wear them in the pulpit at Hickory Grove Church.

"I'm not too good to wear them," I said, "but what will people say about it?"

"Well, my offer still holds," he said. "If you change your mind, let me know," Mr. Dooley continued, "they won't cost you a cent, but I expect you to preach in the overalls."

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1. Phil. 3:13



"They will serve as a wind breaker and will help to protect you in this frightful weather!"

It was in January. The weather had been unseasonably warm for several days. People had been attending the services in their summer clothing, the men in their shirt-sleeves. Suddenly one afternoon it grew colder. The temperature continued to drop rapidly. By the next morning, it was said, unofficially, to be thirty-degrees below zero.

This created something of a problem for me. My clothing simply was not adequate for that kind of weather. I had gone on this particular day to the home of Mr. Wesley Dooley, who operated a country store. A shipment of overalls had just arrived. The idea of my wearing a pair of them for additional protection from the weather had been suggested as something of a joke.

Suffice it to say that I finally accepted the overalls and preached for many days at Hickory with them on over my suit. To make the incident really a humorous one was the fact that the overalls were several sizes too large for me. The trousers were so long, that when the necessary cuff was turned up it extended almost to my knees. What a funny sight I must have been, with those blue overalls and white cuffs turned up. To my glad surprise, everyone seemed to enjoy it thoroughly and the criticism that I had expected was never heard. —

Speaking of the phenomenal change that took place in the weather, driving me to preach in overalls, leads me to a further comment about mother nature. When she goes on a rampage in Nicholas, she means business! The most of the time she gives fair warning that she is going to put on a demonstration, but once in a while, just to keep everyone alert and with a proper respect for her, she will throw one of her tantrums with such suddenness that everyone is left bewildered in the Wilderness.

### THEY KILLED THE FATTED CALF

Throughout this writing much is said about revivals. It couldn't be otherwise if one were going to talk about what

happened in Nicholas. There were nine churches on the charge and a revival was held each year in each of them. The average length of time in each of these was two weeks.

A revival in those days was a major event. Preparations for it would be under way in the community for many weeks in advance. Farmers would literally "kill the fatted calf" which they had raised especially for the company that they expected during the revival. People would come for miles, relatives and their friends, and would stay in the community for as long as the meeting lasted. Some referred to the revival as "The protracted meeting." Some of them were really "protracted!" I recall one revival at Hickory Grove that lasted one month, with services twice each day.

In connection with the revival, services were often held in the homes and in the woods in addition to the two services that were conducted each day at the church. It was a common experience while walking through the woods to hear a loud voice as some man would be in prayer, down on his knees by a stump or log, and calling upon God in all earnestness for the success of the meetings, the salvation of his loved ones and of his own soul. There were many conversions in the woods on the way to and from the church. The service could never be said to be over when the benediction had been pronounced. Prayer services would be held in the woods and along the road and in the homes. The only topic of conversation in the community for miles around was the revival.

It was an inspiration at night to stand at the top of some elevation and from that vantage point to watch the movement of light from kerosene lanterns carried by people to light their way to church and converging upon the church from all directions. Sometimes there would be four or five stringing along close together, sometimes only one, moving faster as though someone had fallen behind and was trying to catch up. Then you would hear a song in the woods as the people walked along, single file, on the narrow paths to the church. Sometimes it would be an hour before the service. It was a thrill to watch and listen, and

to anticipate the service that would take place at the church later that evening. Many were the so called prodigal sons who returned in those days, bringing gladness and joy to the hearts of many. Many were the homes that felt that the revival was truly the time to "Kill the fatted calf!"

Incidentally, in thinking of the kerosene lanterns carried by the worshippers, I recall other valuable uses that it had. Many times when the lights at the church would fail, each member of the congregation would light his lantern and hang it on a nail on the wall, or place it on a window sill that it would help provide light in the church. When the hymns were sung, someone would stand at the organ, holding his lantern, that the organist could see his music. The most of the churches used gasoline lamps that had to be kept "pumped up" during the service. They had mantles on them which were easily destroyed in the wind or by removing or replacing the globe. They were most undependable. Sometimes the kerosene lanterns were used for heating purposes as mentioned in another part of this writing.

## HOT IRONS AND TOBOGANS

In most of the churches on the Earl Charge, the minister was expected to stay at a different home each night during his special evangelistic meetings which might continue for as long as one month, or even longer. This worked a real hardship on the minister who, being miles away from the parsonage, had to live out of a "suit case," for weeks at a time. However, there was an exception to this general rule at the Dixon church. During the day time, the preacher's home was wherever his hat was off. But at night, his home was with the Willard Hughes Family, whose kindness and considerations of their minister has never been forgotten. I remember that one cold night, when the temperature was said to be thirty degrees below zero, — and I have reasons not to doubt that it was, — Lyda heated an iron in the open fireplace as we visited and conducted our devotions. She then wrapped the hot iron in towels and placed it in my bed, which



was located in another room where there were no provisions for a fire. Later in that series of meetings at Dixon, Lyda and Willard moved my bed into the dining room, where there was a fireplace, and Willard provided enough wood to keep the fire burning all night. I would awaken time after time during the night to throw more wood on the fire to keep it alive. Often, when I couldn't sleep, I could enjoy watching the flames of the open fire, which would light up the room. Before moving to the dining room, I enjoyed the light from a beautiful little blue kerosene lamp, which was a choice possession of Ivalou, who would be glad to let the preacher use it. — What can one say to express appreciation for such wonderful kindness and hospitality? There are no adequate words! All one can say is "Thank you!" It is my hope that this little volume will at least serve to acknowledge appreciation to the Hughes', Dorseys', O'Dells, and countless other friends in Nicholas who befriended me in the long ago.

Another kind lady of the church, commonly known as Aunt Lizzie O'Dell, wife of brother Lewis O'Dell, about whom much is to be said later, used to provide a very heavy woolen cap, or "tobogan," as it was called, that provided protection for my ears while I slept. Many times at the O'Dell home I would awaken in the morning to see that the nail-heads in the doors and walls were white with frost. There was not, in most places we stayed, a fire of any kind in the room where we slept. At one place, a kerosene lantern was left burning in the room to keep the frost out, but there was no fireplace or stove. The lantern, as you know, was never intended as a heating unit but rather for light. Anyway, you may well imagine what would have happened to my ears without the tobogan when temperatures would often be twenty below zero and a few times even 30 below. This was another of the many occasions that I had reasons for remembering what the Man From Nicholas, whom I had met at conference, had said: "It's mighty rugged up there, mighty rugged!" He had known what he was talking about.

However, I am most thankful for the experiences in Nicholas; all of the experiences. With regard to the hardships encountered,

one feels like coining a phrase and saying simply that "last year's difficulties are this year's blessings," for even those experiences, in perspective of the years, are priceless. They have made us rich, not in material possessions, but rich in friendship, faith and love. It served to make us rich in appreciation and thankfulness, for when we recall the hardships we endured we recall also the kindnesses of the people in helping us through them! As the hot irons and tobogans brought warmth and comfort to our physical body in the years that are gone, so the memory of them brings warmth in a spiritual way to our hearts as we remember. —

At this point I would like to acknowledge with grateful appreciation the wise counsel, good influence and inestimable help received in my first pastorate from my fellow Methodist ministers of Nicholas County that were serving currently with me in the County during my first pastorate. They were the late Rev. Scott Chapman, then pastor of First Methodist Church at Richwood; the late Rev. O. E. Elkins, then pastor of the Methodist Church at Summersville and the late Rev. E. B. Ware, then pastor of the Levasy Charge. They were all men of experience, able and willing to help me with the varied problems concerning which I often went to them. I was young, only twenty-one years old, inexperienced as a pastor; needing books, advice, help on reports, you name the problem, I had it. There had to be somebody to whom I could appeal for help. These men, endowed richly with a brotherly spirit, were called upon, as I've indicated, time after time. —

As the Master has said, ". . . A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."<sup>1</sup> Surely among the other spiritual attributes of abundant life, memory of deeds of kindness on the part of many friends in the past, looms large. As the Apostle Paul once said, ". . . the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."<sup>2</sup> "Now abideth faith, hope, and love."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Lk. 12:15

2. II Cor. 4:18

3. I Cor. 13:13

## THE OLD HICKORY CANE

Mr. J. I. Dorsey, of Rupert, W. Va., of whom I was speaking earlier, has in his possession a tape recording of a voice and a song that is vivid in the memory of many. It is the voice of a dear friend, the late Uncle Lewis O'Dell, as he was commonly known. He was always present at Hickory Grove Church and usually the one who lit the lamps, took care of the fires and lead in the singing. I used to love to hear him sing one of his favorite songs, the sentiment of which is dear to the hearts of many in Nicholas. It was called "The Old Hickory Cane." The following are some of the lyrics of the song:

*O well do I remember when I was a child  
And lived in the old cabin home.  
The chimney was deep and the hearth,  
it was wide  
The fire dogs how brightly they shone.*

Chorus:

*The old Hickory Cane  
The old Hickory Cane  
The cane that was knotty and worn  
My Father's companion, the staff of  
his life  
Its absence I ne'er could have borne.  
Twas pleasant while working way out on  
the farm  
How welcome the old dinner horn  
The long winter evenings brought cider  
and fruit  
The popping of chestnuts and corn.  
The spirit of mischief seemed ever was there  
We strove to keep still but in vain  
The signal "Be quiet" I ne'er shall forget  
The thump of the old hickory cane.  
We thought it was pleasure, his hand on  
his cane*



*Our father a story would tell  
Each eye would be bent on his good  
natured face  
The home I remember it well.*

*His high back chair still looks silent and  
worn*

*His Bible is lying there still  
The years of old age laid its hand on his  
brow,  
And bent his tall form to its will.*

*A nook in the corner still holds the old cane  
The hand that carressed it is gone  
We laid him to rest, but forever will keep  
The cane that is knotty and worn.*

These lines were copied as they were remembered from the singing of Uncle Lewis O'Dell. The printed lines could not be found. Evidently they had been handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation. However, in memory I can still see Uncle Lewis sitting there in the "Amen corner" of old Hickory Church, and usually in the front row. And very often, someone in their testimony would request that, if the preacher didn't mind, they would like to ask Uncle Lewis O'Dell to sing. When he would be requested to sing The Old Hickory Cane, you could see the congregation nodding approval. He sang it with such meaning and feeling. Almost always, before he was through, tears would be racing down his face and his voice would quiver with emotion. I remember of how I used to listen, and study the expressions on his face as he sang this song, and would have like to know what precious connotations this song conjured up in his mind. He was very obviously carried back, perhaps to his own home and the relationship of his father to himself, his brothers, George and Grant and others in his family gathered around the open fireplace in days that were then lost to him forever except in memory.

## FROM OUT OF THE PAST

A few years ago, I was bringing the message on The TV Chapel Of The Air program from Channel three, WSAZ, Huntington. A young man who had attended a revival at Hickory Grove Church more than a quarter of a century before that time, had tuned in our service. His TV set went on the "blink" in the midst of the program and so he continued by way of his memory and imagination. He wrote the following letter which I appreciated and feel that it deserves a place in LAUGHTER AND TEARS IN THE MOUNTAINS. At one place in the letter, his reference is to Uncle Lewis O'Dell, whom I wrote about in the previous section, "The Old Hickory Cane."

Mt. Nebo, W. Va.

Nov. 23, 1959

Rev. Russell Lowther

Dear Sir:

"Sunday I was watching TV Chapel and it came on nice and clear. I saw a fine choir and the minister come out dressed in his robe, but thats' about where the old TV started acting up.

"Anyhow, the picture changed and the preacher is standing in the pulpit of a small country church and instead of a robe he is wearing, of all things, a pair of new overalls! Oh well, he has walked quite a distance through the snow and his overcoat is a little threadbare.

"The church must be a little cold for most everybody is sitting near the stove, but all are paying close attention as the preacher reads: (Could be they are waiting to see if he misquotes a passage of scripture).

"After the scripture reading an old gentleman on the front seat goes over and puts some coal in the stove, and then without going back for his hymnal starts to sing. Somewhere along the first verse the rest of the crowd joins in and they are almost as good as the choir I saw at first on TV.

"For a minute I thought the next scene was part of a western. A rider comes down a rocky mountain trail and pauses on the bank of a little boulder filled stream. He seems to be a little bit scared to try the ford. I looked back to see if he is being followed by a posse but can't see any and I wonder because the horseback rider seems to be in a hurry.

"About this time I realize that it isn't a western for the rider and the overalled preacher are one and the same.

"The next picture is on top of the mountain across the stream. There a young girl waits in a ramshakel building glorified by the name parsonage and somehow I know that is the preacher's destination. His yen to see the girl is stronger than his fear of the river and taking a death grip on the saddle horn, he plunges in, at first up to the horses knees, then its breast and now the rider must raise his feet to keep them out of the water.

"Well, I guess he made it across, for Huntington comes back on now and I'm sure its the same guy, telling a yarn about some shoe cobbler, which he is using as an illustration in his sermon on TV."

Reminiscently yours,  
Elmer O'Dell

## THE AILING PREACHER AND THE VETERINARY

Once while in the Wilderness, I became ill and felt as though I might be coming down with the flu. I was taken to the home of Dr. "Charley" Beam, a veterinary, who lived in that community. He was the only doctor available the most of the time in that section during the winter. It was several miles to Summersville and the most of the time there were no telephones. When someone needed a doctor, it was necessary for someone to go on horse-back to Summersville for help. Roads were virtually impassable for long periods. Snow would drift thirty feet deep in places.



However, I was glad on that particular night to have the veterinary do for me to the best of his ability. I can close my eyes now and in memory see the old doctor sitting there by his table in the light of a flickering oil lamp and mixing medicine that I was to take. I lay there in bed studying him as he worked. I thought he must look like the picture that I had in mind of the prophet Isaiah. He wore a graying beard about one inch long and heavy mustache and long flowing white hair. He was concentrating with all his powers upon the business at hand and mumbling audibly; "Now a tincture of this and now a tincture of that and now stir it well!" Then he would hum a tune and keep stirring; adding something else once in a while from his old leather medicine bag that he carried when he went to doctor the horses. Whatever he had in the concoction he gave me I'll never know, but it did the work. Soon I was resting very well and went soon to sleep.

There came another experience that night that I'll not soon forget. I awakened sometime during the night and opening my eyes in that strange house, and being also still under the influence of the medicine I had taken, I thought I saw a ghost in my room.

Of course, this was ridiculous, I kept telling myself, for I didn't believe in ghosts! But, there before my eyes, moving back and forth between me and the window, was one! The moon was shining through the window and also a dim light was coming from the oil lamp that had been turned down low. I watched this strange creature for quite some time. Then it started moving toward me across the room. Closer and closer it came until it was bending over me.

Just as I was rapidly changing my mind about not believing in ghosts, the strange creature that had stopped moving and was hovering over me, gave out with a muffled cough! It was the old Dr. Beam, dressed in his long white night shirt! He had come back from his room to check on me. I thought the old "Vet" would die laughing when I sat up in bed and told him what I thought he was! He told this story all over the country.

The old Doctor and his good wife were to have another good laugh on me the next morning. When I had arrived late the night before at the Beam home, I had explained to Mrs. Beam that it wouldn't be necessary for her to prepare breakfast for me the next morning, for I never ate any breakfast. However, the next morning I sat at the breakfast table with the family and was eating breakfast as though I were starved. I soon realized the inconsistency and began to apologize. "I just can't imagine myself eating breakfast," I said. "I very seldom eat anything of a morning!"

"Oh, that's all right, think nothing of it, said Dr. Beam, "You've never had any horse medicine before, either!"

I was one among many people throughout the Wilderness that was very fond of Dr. Beam. While he was a veterinary, he did much to help people in varied times of emergencies, as explained earlier in this writing. In fact, he is credited with having saved many lives. He would go over those rugged mountains at any hour, day or night, that anyone called him and would do whatever he could to help. He had mid-wife license and delivered hundreds of babies. There is scarcely a home in that whole area that Dr. Beam did not help in some capacity at one time or another across the years. In memory I can see him now as he trudged his way along the muddy roads and through the fields, dressed in his heavy brown overcoat, used in the first World War, and his brown vest, with pockets filled with thermometers and pencils and note paper and with a heavy watch chain and watch fob dangling on his vest. He carried a stick in one hand and his old leather medicine bag in the other. I don't think I ever saw him without either. The stick was used as a cane, although he did not need it as a cane, but as protection against dogs.

In November of 1964, Dr. and Mrs. Beam commemorated their sixty-sixth wedding anniversary. They had seven daughters and two sons. There were fifty-six grandchildren, eighty-six great-grandchildren and two great-great-grandchildren who were the pride of their lives. Dr. Beam passed away in October, 1966, at the age of ninety-one years, and was laid to rest in the cemetery

of Old Hickory Church, where I had been called upon to conduct his services. The community lost a devoted servant in the passing of Dr. Beam. I hope that in time a suitable memorial of his services may be established and that the memory of this good doctor will be perpetuated.

## TORNADO IN THE WILDERNESS

At about three o'clock in the afternoon of March 23, 1935, I was sitting in my car near the Court House in Summersville, when suddenly it grew almost as dark as night. A sudden strong wind seemed almost to lift the car. Then, almost as quickly as it had started it ceased. Later that afternoon, word began to filter in from the Wilderness that a tornado had struck.

En route next morning to Dixon by way of Hominy Falls I began to see the evidence of the storm. Tall pine trees had been blown across the road, twisted off at ground level. Workmen had chopped and sawed their way through the fallen timber so that it was like driving through a tunnel. The church at Hominy Falls had been moved about the width of itself. The cement steps remained to mark the spot where it had stood. The church remained intact, however, and a few weeks later a new foundation was put under it at its new location.

Mr. Homer Nutter and Mr. Elsworth Westfall of Hominy Falls had a narrow escape in the storm. They heard the storm coming and tried to enter the church, but could not. Then they tried to get under the church, and happily they were unable to do this. By this time, there was no longer a choice of where to go! They were blown against the side of the church and held against it by the strength of the wind. So, they had actually ridden the Penile Church over to the new location, but it had not been a very enjoyable ride.

At Dixon, the storm blew windows out of the home of Mr. J. R. G. O'Dell and some of his possessions that were blown out through the windows were never found. Large stones from the chimney were blown far out into the yard without touching



the roof. This is remarkable when one considers that the chimney, of which the stones were a part, was located in the center of the house.

At Hickory Grove, a barn at the home of Alonzo Dorsey was blown down, killing a cow and injuring a horse so severely that it had to be destroyed. It is remarkable indeed, that such a storm occurred with almost unbelievable destruction everywhere and yet not a human life was lost.

In many ways, I felt that the tornado in the Wilderness was a parable of the storms of life; storms of doubt and fear, sorrow and temptation. They are most severe at times, but soon pass over. The darkness is abated, the fury is past, the sun shines again! I have long cherished that verse of scripture, "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love Him and are called according to His purpose."<sup>1</sup>

### THE STRANGE CASE OF THE MISSING TROUSERS

"Are you alright in there, preacher? Why don't you come on out? Breakfast is getting cold!"

It was the voice of Mr. Granville O'Dell, with whom I had spent the night at Hominy Falls after filling my appointment at Peniel Church the night before.

"I'm alright, I'll be out in a minute," I replied. It turned out that it was longer than a minute before I came out. In fact it seemed to me that I might not be able to come out until noon, and maybe not then. Something awful had happened; something that has never been fully explained even to this day.

When Mr. O'Dell called the first time to awaken me, I leaped out of bed, surprised that it was morning, I had slept so soundly. It seemed to me that we had just gone to bed. It was

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1. Romans 8:28

one of those times when one sleeps so soundly that it is almost as though one has been dead for eight hours. However, I began to dress as rapidly as possible, not wanting to inconvenience the family in having to wait on me for breakfast. But I soon found that I was in a most embarrassing position! I couldn't find my trousers! I looked everywhere; under the bed; between the covers on the bed; in the dresser drawers and every other possible place, but no trousers! Then the voice of Mr. O'Dell, again! Are you all right in there, preacher? Why don't you come on out?"

I continued my search after answering him. I couldn't believe it. I had lost about every possession I had ever had at one time or another in my life, but never before had I lost my trousers.

Finally, on the third call of Mr. O'Dell, I made known my most humiliating circumstance! — He laughed so hard that I was convinced for a moment that he had taken my trousers as a joke. But he insisted that he had not! The whole family by this time knew of my trouble and had joined in the search. I don't think I was ever more humiliated in my life. I remember that as a child in school I once had been given "My Most Embarrassing Experience," as a subject upon which to write. I thought of this experience, it would have helped me then, but, I didn't think of anything that could help me in that embarrassing moment. I felt so ridiculous running around my room dressed only in my long underwear and wrapped in a sheet and with the whole family laughing as they continued the search for my pants! What an unfortunate moment that was.

However, the trousers were finally found at the end of a long hallway leading away from my room. How they got there I suppose I'll never know. It is yet a mystery. The most likely explanation is that I had walked in my sleep and had placed them there.

In the room where I had slept, there were many trophies on the wall. Among them were coconut shells resembling shrunken heads that had been painted by natives of far away places that

had been sent to Mr. O'Dell by relatives who had traveled around the world. I laughed and told Mr. O'Dell that these weird looking objects had become animated during the night and had engaged in mischief, then when morning came they resumed their place on his wall.

I was back to the O'Dell home many times after this incident and always when we would end our visiting and start to retire for the night, Mr. O'Dell would say: "Preacher, hold on to your trousers tonight! maybe you had better sleep with them on!" Then everyone would go off to their room laughing. In the morning when he would call me to breakfast, he would call as loudly as he could, so every one in the house would be sure to hear: "Alright, preacher man, come out with your pants on, breakfast is ready!"

### HOMINY FALLS WIT AND HUMOR

One of the fascinating things about the Earl Charge was the battle of wits that always ensued when certain men came together; men like J. C. Ramsey, at Glad Tidings, Granville O'Dell and Johnson Wiseman, at Hominy Falls, Walter Dooley, at Jordan Chapel and many others. I believe that Nicholas people are unexcelled anywhere when it comes to having a sense of humor and keen wit.

It was a one ring "circus" every time Granville O'Dell and Johnson Wiseman came together. I confess that, although they didn't realize it, I purposely planned situations that would bring them together many times just to hear the battle of wit that would take place. Sometimes one would win out and sometimes the other.

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On one occasion, Mr. O'Dell was very ill. Mr. Wiseman came to see him for they were very special friends and loved to be together. Mr. O'Dell said: "Johnson, you and me have been very close for so many years. But I am now very sick and it looks like I may 'pass over,' I just wonder what you'll do if I die?" Quick as a "flash" Mr. Wiseman replied:



"Well, Granville I'll tell you what I would do, I would take the lock off of my meat house!" Mr. O'Dell had to laugh despite his illness.

Mr. O'Dell once operated a store at Hominy Falls. A certain woman in that community was in the habit of stealing his eggs at the store. She would watch for a chance when he was not watching and would slip a half-dozen or more eggs in her blouse and walk out with them. One day Mr. O'Dell watched her "out of the corner of his eye" until she had the eggs in her blouse. Then he came from behind the counter, and with several customers watching, he walked up to the lady and said: "I have been admiring you for so long! You are so attractive! I have often thought of how I would like to hug you, and I'm going to do that right now!" Thereupon he threw his arms around her, giving her a tight hug and breaking all the eggs! Needless to say, she never attempted to steal eggs again at his store.

Mr. O'Dell, with his keen sense of humor, could relate many stories about funny things that had happened at Hominy Falls. Sometimes it was with regard to matters that were supposed to be most serious that he was able to see something humorous.

He once told the story about a certain man whom he knew who was trying to "get right with God!" The preacher was talking to him and trying to help him. The preacher would quote the scriptures to him and then they would pray together. But the man insisted that he had not been "saved" yet; that he didn't feel that all was well with his soul. Finally the preacher, according to Mr. O'Dell's story, said to the man; "well, I guess, Mr. "John Doe," that you are just going to have to make restitution!"

"And pray tell what do that mean?" said the man.

"Well," the preacher went on to explain, "that means that if in your life at any time you have taken anything from anybody in any false manner or cheated anyone out of anything, you are going to have to give it back and four times more than you took, according to the scriptures, 'restore fourfold'."

"See here, preacher," the man replied, "that would mighty near break a body up!"

Early in my pastorate in Nicholas, I had a brief acquaintance with a Rev. Harvey, who was then serving at Hominy Falls Charge. Rev. Harvey was as witty as anyone could be and had a good sense of humor. One day we were on a program together. While seated on the platform, he leaned over to me during some announcements that were being made by the man in charge, and asked: "Brother Lowther, do you know what made me so bald?" — (Brother Harvey didn't have a hair on his head), —

"No," I whispered back to him, wondering what people would think of our behaviour at such a time and place as that, "what made you so bald?"

"My hair all came out," he replied, with a mischievous grin on his face.

"That'll do it every time," I whispered back at him.

Later that day at the home of one of my members, brother Harvey, with an air of great excitement as though a great idea had just come to mind, said to the people seated on the porch. "Do you know what they make sauerkraut out of down in Virginia?" Everyone shook their heads indicating that they didn't know. "Well," he continued, with a look of great satisfaction on his face, "They make it out of cabbage the same as in West Virginia."

## TEACHER PAR EXCELLENCE

At Mount Nebo, we were often at the home of Mr. James Clark Ramsey and his good wife, Melcenia. To hundreds of Nicholas County people, Mr. Ramsey, commonly know as "Professor," Ramsey, was one of the greatest teachers in the history of the county. He was a veteran of fifty regular terms as teacher in the public schools and had taught many other special sessions.

Mr. Ramsey, a scholarly gentleman, wrote a book, *RAMSEY FAMILY HISTORY*,<sup>1</sup> which is most interesting, not only that it gives the genealogy of his family, but also for the wealth of information that it conveys regarding the history of the period. Mr. Ramsey was the proud owner of a wonderful library, which, as he often explained, was purchased with money that he saved from not using tobacco.

The "Professor" was one of the most unique persons that it was ever my pleasure to know. I have often thought that if I were to write a book on the theme, "The Most Interesting Person I Have Known," I might possibly choose to write about Mr. Ramsey.

For one thing, he was the most observing person that I ever knew. For example, he once pointed out to me a star in the sky at 11:00 A.M. on a bright sunny day. I thought he was joking when he told me this, but he insisted that he was serious in the matter and proved it to me. When I was utterly unable to see the star as he pointed to it, he took out his pocket knife and cut a notch on the corner of the house. He then cut another notch on the wash-stand on the back porch. Then he asked me to sight across the two notches as though they were the sights on a rifle. I did this and to my amazement there was the star plainly visible.

The "Professor" used to tell me how that he was a liberal in just about everything except the use of tobacco and strong drink. In his eighty-second year, a newspaper in Richwood stated that: "He has been a "liberal," faithful to a policy established by his father, and in his own words, 'It's too late to change me now'." He was proud of the fact that he was first in many things in Nicholas, and that he hoped to continue being first until he was overtaken by the "grim-reaper!" He once said, "I like to try new things," and he attributed his young ideas to his association with young people, having taught fifty terms of school in Nicholas. Some of the things in which he had been first were: He purchased the first wheat drill in the county, 1891; He used the first commer-

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1. The Publisher unknown, Copy does not reveal identity



cial fertilizer, 1883; He had the first acetylene light plant in the county; and he had the first radio in Nicholas.

Mr. Ramsey regarded himself as contrary and hard to get along with. He once told me of how "Uncle Mat" Hughes used to say that He, — Mr. Ramsey, — was so contrary that if he fell in the river and drowned he wouldn't look down the stream for his body, for he would be too contrary to float with the current, he would float up stream against the current. Anyway, I never found this to be true of the "Professor." I found him most congenial and a most delightful person with whom to be associated. He had a good sense of humor and a dry, chuckling sort of laugh that amused me. He seemed to enjoy confusing me and leaving me with some uncertainty as to whether he were serious or whether he was joking.

When we were leaving his home to go for my first appointment at his church at Glad Tidings, Mr. Ramsey handed me five dollars. When I asked him what this was for, he explained that: "My church is assessed to pay sixty-dollars this year on your salary. I want to do my part because I belong to the church. However, I am very easily offended, and after I hear you preach I will probably never like you again. So if I don't pay you something before I hear you preach you would probably never get it." Well, the "Professor" never became offended at me and had great patience in helping me with the work of the church.

Catherine and I loved to go to Mr. Ramsey's home and would spend many enjoyable evenings listening to his stories about the Civil War. His father had been a Captain in the Union Army, and in charge of a fort at Kessler's Cross Lanes, which was lost in an attack by the Confederate soldiers.

The old log house in which Mr. Ramsey had been born and in which he lived for fifty years stood within about fifty-yards of his home where we visited him. He used to take us to the old house and point out the bullet holes, the marks of a skirmish that occurred one day when Confederate Soldiers undertook to capture his father. His father had escaped and his mother had saved the family rifle by hiding it in the flour barrel.

I have noted that in his book, RAMSEY FAMILY HISTORY, Mr. Ramsey's most brief chapter is about himself. He began this chapter by the use of two quotations that came to his mind: "Solomon said, 'Let another praise thee and not thyself.' But another wise man, Wm. J. Bryan said, 'If you do not toot your own horn it may never be tooted'." Indeed, many have praised Mr. Ramsey; he was a Teacher Par Excellence, known and admired by untold hundreds in Nicholas, who had been in his classes. But it was not only that he was a pioneer in education in Nicholas and in this way made a contribution to so many lives that he was admired. The "Professor," inspite of his great wealth of knowledge and the many honors that were bestowed upon him, never lost the "common touch!" He, though a man of great influence and power in his community, had time for us little people.

In closing these remarks regarding the "Professor," Teacher Par Excellence, I think of what a minister recently said of a prominent man whose funeral he was conducting. He said that "Wherever the deceased sat down, that became the head of the table!" So it was with Mr. Ramsey! People admired and respected him, and in a most real sense wherever he sat down that became the head of the table.

#### THE CIRCUIT PREACHER AS COON-HUNTER

I remember that one year in a revival at Glad Tidings, I was not able to get the young men of the community to attend. I learned that the reason was they were spending the nights coon-hunting. I told the young men that if they would come to church I would then go hunting with them after services. They took me up on this proposition and turned out in good numbers to the services. I wouldn't "back down" and so spent several nights hunting with them. One problem arose, however, we wouldn't get home until about daylight and before many days passed I had to abandon the project for the loss of sleep.

A humorous thing occurred one night. We became lost in the woods, and had some difficulty in finding our way home.

We made several circles, not knowing that we had made them. An older man in the party recognized the fact that we were walking in large circles and coming back to the same place we had been an hour or so before. The rest of the party refused to believe that we were doing this, and so kept going. Finally, the man who knew what we were doing, sat down on a log and said: "All right, you guys, just go on and wear yourselves out if you want to, I'm going to sit here until you come around again!" We couldn't talk the old fellow into going on with us. Finally, we went on without him. In fact, by this time everyone was nearly tired out and tempers were flaring a little. Any way, in about three quarters of an hour we saw a light. Everyone was glad, feeling that we were at last near someones house, or if not, there would be someone there to tell us where we were. You can imagine our disgust when we approached the light and found that it was the lantern of the old-timer still sitting on the log where we had left him. It was daylight before we found our way home.

One of the fellow coon-hunters, Mr. O. H. "Bud" Huffman, later went into the ministry and after serving in the West Virginia Conference a few years went to Florida where he serves as a Methodist Minister.

I did not at first realize that there was any danger involved in "night-game-hunting" until I visited at the home of Mr. Joel Armentrout and some of the young people gave me an introduction to the cliffs of Gauley! They showed me the spot where a man, Mr. Theodore Moses, had fallen to his death not too long before this. This could very easily happen to hunters at night with the only light being that of lanterns which they carried. Also, the excitement of the chase would increase the danger of an accident. Anyway, the experience of coon-hunting, while enjoyable and exciting, didn't last too long!

Many times I have thought of the old fellow sitting on a log and waiting while the rest of the party did a lot of useless walking; going in one circle after another and getting nowhere! It can be that way in life too. One may spend his time, energy and material means in ways that bring no lasting value and really



doesn't take us anywhere! And as we make our so called useless circles, there is always the danger of the cliffs in the darkness! Happily there is One who is "The Way, The Truth and The Life."<sup>1</sup> "And you will know the truth and the truth will make you free."<sup>2</sup>

## BUCKWHEAT CAKES — MOLASSES AND FIFTY CENTS

During the meeting mentioned at Glad Tidings, I went one night to visit and stay all night at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Clark O'Dell, who lived near the church. This turned out to be a most delightful evening and most spiritually rewarding. After our devotions were held around the open fire place, we had a most interesting visit, one of those kind that makes a lasting impression and the value of which increases with the years as it is remembered.

Mr. O'Dell handed me fifty-cents. He had been saving it for me for many days and was sorry that it couldn't be more. I didn't want to take it, but he insisted. He then told me that he was sorry to say that for breakfast the next morning we would have only buckwheat cakes and molasses. He felt that in all probability I was used to having more than this. He taught me a lesson in humility that I haven't forgotten.

He did not know, of course, that I am very fond of buckwheat and molasses and that as far as the fifty-cents was concerned, it would purchase oil for the lamp at the parsonage, which at that time was running a great deal lower than he knew. Times were most difficult. It was the decade of the depression. The pastor's salary was only six-hundred dollars a year from the whole charge of nine churches! All of this, of course, is hard for people in the comfortable circumstances of these modern times to realize.

However, while the few cents would place oil in the parsonage lamp to give us light, the spirit in which it was given would be a spiritual light and warmth forever in our hearts. After all, as the Master has said: ". . . A man's life does not consist in the

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1. Jn. 14; 6

2. Jn. 8; 32

abundance of his possessions.”<sup>1</sup> Life consists rather in love, faith, sympathy, understanding, gratitude, friendship, and in qualities of spirit set forth in the Sermon On The Mount.<sup>2</sup>

### AND CATHERINE SAVED THE APPLE BUTTER

“Get out! run to safety! keep away from the car,” I shouted to Catherine, as black smoke came boiling up from under the hood of our old car as we labored through the mud near Summersville. Obviously the car was on fire and would go up in flames any minute. Catherine obeyed very well — that time!

However, I finally succeeded in putting out the fire, although I burned my hands rather severely in doing so. I looked about to see where Catherine had gone. If I had only had a camera at that moment! I would have given most anything for that picture. There she stood down below the road, clutching in her arms a half gallon jar of apple butter that someone had given us in the Wilderness.

I was happy, of course, that the apple butter was going to be saved, had our car really been destroyed. However, in the car was the only suit of clothes I had to my name; there was my typewriter; there was my new Abingdon Bible Commentary that I had just paid five-dollars for; there was my Bible; my sermon notes; Catherine’s handbag with every cent we had on earth in it! In fact, about everything we had of any value was in that car. But Catherine, bless her heart, was going to make certain that we saved the apple butter. — I was just thinking that if there is ever an “Apple Butter Festival” anywhere, I would cast my vote for Catherine to be the Queen of it!

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1. Lk. 12; 15  
2. Mt. 5;





*IV.*

*IN FAITH, SONG  
AND PRAYER*

## LEGEND OF THE PRAYER ROCK

There is a rugged place in the woods not far from Mount Nebo that has become a legend in the Wilderness. It is known as The Prayer Rock. Mighty men in prayer, among them Mr. Mat Hughes, Mr. George Shawver and others, frequented this place as a special place of prayer. Here beneath the great rock, they somehow felt nearer to God than anywhere. They knew, of course, that God is everywhere at all times, but they felt somehow that they could more nearly "touch the fringe of his garment"<sup>1</sup> here than anywhere.

However, the importance of this special place of prayer to prominent men who had lived in that community was well known and became a legend. How many generations has come and gone since the time the prayer rock emphasis started, no one seems to know, but its significance everyone understands. Its influence at the time of my pastorate in Nicholas was very great. During revivals in the Wilderness at Glad Tidings and Gilgal and other churches, a service would be held at the rock. Not infrequently, individuals with some great problem confronting them, would go alone to that place to seek Divine guidance and help. At times, during the revivals especially, there was a beaten path to The Prayer Rock.

Many stories are told of how, when trouble arose and help was needed for someone seriously ill, or comfort for someone in great sorrow, someone would saddle a horse and ride to the home of the man of prayer near the great Rock, and request him to pray. He would arise, light his lantern, and make off across his garden into the woods to his special place of prayer. There he would talk to God in behalf of those in distress.

It is a good thing for everyone to have a special place of prayer; a place where, knowing that only he and God are there, one may be able to free himself from all pretenses and in all sincerity lift his heart to "The throne of Grace."

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1. Mt. 9; 21, 22

I heard much about the prayer life of Mr. George Shawver, who had lived long before my day in Nicholas. His memory is cherished there and the legend of "The Prayer Rock" and the contribution that he made to it will doubtless never die in The Wilderness.

Incidentally, while visiting at the home of brother Shawver's grand-daughter, Mrs. Okey O'Dell near the Dixon Church, I was shown an interesting heirloom. It was a heavy piece of iron, which Brother Shawver had designed and pounded out on his anvil in his blacksmith shop. It was made of horseshoes and other pieces of iron available at the time. It is called "Rock Tongs," and has been used by Brother Shawver in lifting heavy chimney rock into position, for he had been a stone mason as well as a blacksmith. When I saw these "Rock Tongs" and their use was explained to me, I thought of how they might symbolize also the way in which heavy spiritual burdens were lifted from the hearts and minds of troubled people by the faith and prayers of Brother Shawver.

At the passing of Brother Shawver, the "Rock Tongs" fell into the hands of another stone mason who was also a man of prayer, Uncle Grant O'Dell, about whom we have written at length elsewhere in these pages. Uncle Grant and Aunt Laura, as everyone called them, took me into their home and treated me as though I had been one of their own children. Their influence upon my life in Nicholas was very great, and one of the greatest elements of that influence was their faith in Prayer. They have long since gone to "That House Not made with hands,"<sup>1</sup> but their influence lives on and on, and their faith in prayer, and their practice of prayer, is strengthening to recall.

An anthology of the stories of answered prayers in the Wilderness would make a large volume. In fact, it was the faith of most people in our churches there in Nicholas that God answers every prayer. So often reference would be made to the teaching of The Master in which this was promised, namely, "... For every-one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds and to him who

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1. II Cor. 5; 1



knocks it will be opened.”<sup>1</sup> A literal interpretation was given this passage by most people. It was taken as an assurance that God not only listens to every prayer, but that He answers every prayer!

I had some good talks with Uncle Grant about this. It had seemed to me that I had heard many stories about unanswered prayer. Not only this, but it had seemed to me that many of my own prayers regarding most important matters in my life had been unanswered. For example, I had prayed that the way would open for me to go to college. But it didn't happen for four years. At the time of my talks with Uncle Grant, it had not happened! “Isn't this an indication of unanswered prayer?” I asked him!

“No,” he had answered, “You do not understand. God answers every prayer, and He answers in one of two ways, either He will remove the difficulty about which we pray or, if this is not possible, or is not in our best interest, He will give us the faith, courage and wisdom to adjust to the circumstance, whatever it is! In either case, God has answered your prayer.”

Jesus' teachings on prayer included information as to why, where, when and how to pray; what we should pray for, and all else that is necessary for one to know regarding it. If there were parts of his teachings on prayer that were emphasized above others, it was the matter of Faith and attitude in prayer. God, who is like a Father, is listening; His love is unbounded; He wills nothing but that which is best for his children. We must be willing that His Will be done. With this faith and attitude our prayers must be made. Without this faith and attitude, one simply has not prayed.

It is those prayers that are offered in secret that are real. Only God is listening. We are not concerned about what others may at that very moment be thinking about our ideas as we express them. All pretense is gone before the Lord. I am certain that this is why the Master once said, “. . . But when you pray,

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1. Mt. 7:8

go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”<sup>1</sup> I am certain also that this teaching was responsible for the beginning of the Prayer Rock idea in the Wilderness. It is the reason also for the beaten path that is there today, and I hope will be there tomorrow!

## FIRE IN THE MOUNTAINS AND A MIRACLE

In a grave on the side of a mountain overlooking the tremendous Summersville Dam, lies buried all that was temporal of a quiet little man of Christian faith, whose influence upon this humble writer was very great. I have wondered many times what this little man would say if he could return and look upon the magnificent Dam and the changes that it has brought about in the community in which he had lived and died! Knowing him personally for a period of four years and serving as his pastor, I think he would stand wrapt in awe and wonder as he looked upon this marvelous feat of engineering and this is what he would say:

“This is wonderful! I never dreamed of such a thing. It is a miracle; a man-made miracle. But I’ll tell you about another miracle greater than this one that took place right here! It was greater than this; it wasn’t done by human hands. No sir, it was done by the One that created these mountains, and rivers and the sun, moon and stars above. God performed the miracle that I’ll tell you about, and what’s more, he did it cause I asked him to. And like the good man John Wesley that started our church used to sing, ‘I’ll praise my maker while I’ve breath and when my eyes are closed in death, praise shall employ my nobler powers!’ ”

The scene of the little man’s story should be familiar to everyone who visits The Summersville Dam. It occurred at the home of Mr. Joel Armentrout, who lived in the last house that you pass on your right as you approach the new Dam from Mount Nebo.

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1. Mt. 6; 6

You can identify it further by a small artificial lake that has been built there near the house.

The old road, which was little more than a crooked dusty trail, ran through the woods from near the Glad Tidings Church to the Armentrout home. It passed in front of, and very close to his house. Across the road in front of the house, and running parallel with the road, was an old rail fence. Beyond the fence there was a woods and a very steep mountain slope descending almost vertically to the Gauley River Canyon. One day a most dreadful thing occurred! Fire broke out down near Gauley River. It swept across the old abandon railroad where The Curtin Lumber Company had operated their log trains and, being fanned by a fierce wind that arose, rushed up the mountain. The air was filled with sparks and burning leaves that spread the fire all over the mountains. Almost instantly there was a roaring forest fire completely out of all human control. In a matter of minutes, the home of brother Armentrout was threatened as it had never been threatened before. The fire got into the old rail fence across the road from the house and was threatening any moment to blow across the road into the pailing fence around the yard and on the wooden shingles of the roof.

Brother Armentrout fought the fire until he was utterly exhausted. But it was a losing fight, and he knew it! He fell down upon his knees in the road and began to pray! I have heard him tell many times in his testimonies at church what he had said to the Lord in his prayer. This is what he had said: "Oh God! I've done all that I can do. I can do no more. I'm done for! If it is your will that my home must be destroyed, then Thy Will be done! Thou art almighty. I'm only a man, weak and frail and helpless. Thou only art able to do all things! Help me Oh God to save my home! . . . Amen! Amen! and Amen!"

Witnesses have confirmed the fact that instantly the wind changed and blew down the mountain away from the house toward the river! Even the fire that had started in the rail fence was "snuffed" out as though an unseen hand had thrown a wet blanket on it, and that there remained only scattered thin little columns



of smoke to mark the various places that the fire had been burning in the fence. Thus a miracle saved the home of a good little man who, after first doing all within his own power, earnestly prayed. We have often heard it said, and it is surely true, that "Man's extremity is God's opportunity."

Many in reading this story may say to themselves, "Well, it was only a coincidence that the wind changed just at the moment that all seemed lost." However, I would ask this question, namely, who, or what, caused the coincidence? In my humble opinion, God is the same yesterday, today and forever. If the winds and the waves obeyed his voice in ancient Galilee, they would obey his voice in the Mountains above old Gauley Canyon, that a good little man might not be rendered completely destitute, and that he might tell of a miracle not made by hands in the beautiful mountains of Nicholas.

It was a most pleasant experience not long ago, as the Dam was nearing completion, to visit again the scene of this story in company of Mr. and Mrs. Willard Hughes and their daughter, Doris. Doris did the driving and I was free to look with amazement at the changes that have taken place. How utterly amazing it really is! It leaves me spellbound! — Also, on this occasion we had the pleasure of visting Mr. McKinley Armentrout, son of Joel Armentrout, who now lives near Mount Nebo. He helped us to establish the date of the story which we have told. It had occurred in July, 1930, which was three years prior to our going to Nicholas.

## SOUNDS IN THE MOUNTAINS

There were many sounds commonly heard in Nicholas that are as vivid in memory as other experiences. Some of them were beautiful and inspiring; some were frightening, depending upon the circumstances at the time. A few of these sounds were:

The sound of rushing water in Gauley River, swirling and splashing and tumbling down among the boulders and sending up a mist and spray that at times, when the sun was right, created a maze of miniature rainbows;

The cracking and snapping of burning chestnut wood, used as kindling in building of fires in an open fireplace, accompanied by shooting sparks, like fireflies, darting around a room at night;

The woodman's ax; falling trees, the swish of the limbs brushing down to a thudding end as the main trunk of the tree struck the ground;

The loud popping noise of freezing timber after temperatures had remained below zero for many days and nights;

The moaning of the wind in the pine trees; the roaring of high winds in trees heavily coated with sleet and accompanied by the sound of splitting wood as limbs would break off from the weight of the ice and pressure of the wind and come twisting and crushing to the ground;

The distant whistling of the steam engine on the railroad along Meadow River at Nallen, accentuated often times by hard frozen sleet that served as a sounding board and carrying the sound of the whistle for miles; the echo of the original sound of the whistle would linger long in the valleys and canyons of the Wilderness; this was a lonesome sound to a person only twenty-one years of age and never away from home before in his life.

The tender song of the mourning dove, which we commonly called the "rain dove," would often be heard on a quiet Nicholas morning. Somehow I have never been able to understand the use of the term "mourning" in relationship to the sound of the dove. The connotation of this sound to me is not one of sadness. It is one of quiet joy and peace; it is one of solemn contentment; in any case, it is not, — as I hear it, — a sound of mourning! I believe that the mourning dove is the turtledove mentioned often in the Bible. A beautiful passage from The Song Of Solomon<sup>1</sup> conveys feelings of gladness relative to the sound of the dove:

*"For lo, the winter is past,  
the rain is over and gone.  
The flowers appear on the earth,*

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1. S. 2; 11-12

*the time of singing has come,  
And the voice of the turtledove  
is heard in the land. . ."*

The call of the whippoorwill in late evenings in summer just about lamp-lighting-time, also made an impression. I had heard the sound of the whippoorwill all the days of my childhood, but somehow had never thought much about this until the days of my first pastorate. This was not only true of the sound of the whippoorwill, but of many sounds which I had heard frequently but had given but little attention. Anyway, I enjoyed this sound too, and somehow could never come to think of the sound of the whippoorwill as vain repetition! Doubtless whatever this poor bird was trying to say he was most thoroughly convinced of it! It was worth repeating! I never felt like saying to him, "Say, there, fellow, your record is stuck!" As compared, let us say, to the mocking bird, I feel that the lowly whippoorwill deserves a lot of credit. At least he is not a plagiarist. The mocking bird can make some very beautiful arrangements of what other birds have sung, but what he has to offer in his own rite is obscure. I suppose people are a lot like the mocking-bird at times. I once knew a man of my own profession like that. He could preach a most eloquent sermon, but his sermons consisted only of thirty-minutes worth of quotations of what others had said. He clipped them out of newspapers and magazines and arranged them in proper order and on Sunday delivered them to his congregation.

"This reminds me," he would say, "Of something that Dr. John 'Doe', superintendent of \_\_\_\_\_ department of the \_\_\_\_\_, said in an address recently before the \_\_\_\_\_."

Then the dear brother, with an air of delight would say: "What a thought!" After a pause of a few moments to give the congregation time to catch up with the profound utterance, then he would continue; "Dr. John Doe" had quoted from that immortal statement of \_\_\_\_\_ in that well known \_\_\_\_\_, dear to the hearts of thinking people everywhere, namely, "\_\_\_\_\_", and now he was off and running again. I often felt that the dear brother's congregation were most patient and kind; they were



long-suffering! At times, the flashing of wrist watches indicated that their endurance was weakening. Some of the people might actually have been humming to themselves "Listen to the mocking-bird, listen to the mocking-bird . . ." But my friend deserved a lot of credit. In fact, I don't think I ever knew anyone that could arrange his "second-hand" material as well. He was really an artist when it came to this kind of arrangements. —

However, to continue with the Sounds In The Mountains, I think of the shrill little chirp of frightened chipmunks, commonly known as ground squirrels, darting from your path like an orange streak of light, with tail held high and vertical as antenna. The woods of the Wilderness were "full" of them.

Still other sounds were that of lowing of the cattle; the baying of the hounds; the crowing of the rooster, the sounds of numerous other animals of the farm.

There were fierce sounds, such as the scream of the wildcat, the braying of the genny mentioned elsewhere in these pages, and the varied and awful sounds of the mountain owl; sometimes the owl sounds as though a baby were crying.

Another sound in Nicholas vivid in memory is that of the rattling and rumbling of loose plank in the floor of the old Hughes Bridge, which stood directly under the magnificent new bridge that now graces the landscape. Often when my car would be stalled high up against the mountain beyond the bridge, I would hear the rumbling and rattling of the loose plank as an auto or a team of horses were crossing. At those times it was a most welcome sound. It meant that help would soon arrive. — — —

Incidentally, on our last trip from the Wilderness, we had a flat tire on the bridge. I didn't wish to drive any farther on the tire for fear of ruining it, so decided to change it there on the bridge. Before I had finished, Dr. Eugene Brown, Sr., of Summersville, came by on his way from a call he had answered in the Wilderness, and helped me fix the tire. Coincidentally, this was the last time also that I can remember of seeing Dr. Brown, who was a widely known public servant, deeply devoted to his

profession. I had great respect for Dr. Brown, as did countless others in Nicholas. — — —

Mentioning sounds, there were of course those lovely soul-stirring sounds of music in the mountains, to be written about later. Then, of course, never to be forgotten were those sounds mentioned in a lovely hymn of the church: "How sweet on a clear Sabbath Morning, to list to the clear ringing bell. . ."

## SINGING IN THE MOUNTAINS

"O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!"<sup>1</sup> "O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth! Sing to the Lord, bless his name; . . ."<sup>2</sup>

I do not know of anywhere that these admonitions are more literally carried out than in Nicholas. It was most appropriate, indeed, that the Singing Convention of West Virginia, should build its amphitheater at Mount Nebo. This was appropriate, not only because of the central location geographically, but also from the standpoint of interest in singing.

At the time of my ministry in Nicholas County, I felt that the county was the singing capitol of the world! It still is, as far as I am personally concerned, although I would have to admit that I have heard good singing many other places since those melodious day in Nicholas. At that time, 1933-1937, a singing convention was held one Sunday each month and alternated among the churches. The mountains would seem to echo with the sound of music! Not infrequently, the singing would give rise to an evangelistic fervor and there would be conversions among the people who had assembled to hear the singing and to take part in it.

In my churches, practically everyone sang. In this regard I remember the leadership of men like Mr. Arthur O'Dell, Mr.

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1. Ps. 95 ; 1, 2

2. Ps. 96 ; 1, 2

Edmund Ramsey, Mr. Baldrige O'Dell, Mr. Henry Huffman and Mr. Willis Huffman and many others. There was a tall blond young man from Nallen, "Bud" O'Dell and his quartet, that I used to love to hear.

Incidentally, speaking of Mr. "Bud" O'Dell, reminds me of an interesting, although saddening, coincidence. In (November, 1964), I chanced to be visiting with a friend on the street at Summersville. I asked the friend if he had ever known Mr. "Bud" O'Dell and if he still lived at Nallen. I said that I had often thought of looking him up when passing that way, that I used to love to hear him sing and would like to see him again. However, my friend hastened to tell me that he had attended Mr. "Bud" O'Dell's funeral just the day before! — — —

It is a little difficult for me to keep from beginning a sermon at this point. You know what my sermon here would be! "Don't put off important matters, such as visiting your old friends. It may be later than you think!" — — —

Something of the attitude of Nicholas people in general regarding singing was well summed up in a statement made by a member of one of the quartets. I had made the comment that people really seemed to enjoy their singing.

"O yes," the man replied, "we enjoy singing! We always sing as unto the Lord!"

There is so much in The Christian Faith to sing about. Christian people have the real bases for radiance and cheerfulness. Paul once said, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice."<sup>1</sup> On one occasion Jesus said, "Rejoice and be glad."<sup>2</sup> and indicated the reasons for this. He said on another occasion, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."<sup>3</sup>

I have often thought of the part that singing has played in the history of The Christian Religion. At times of great "moun-

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1. Phil 4; 4

2. Mt. 5; 12

3. Jn. 16; 33



tain top" experiences of joy and gladness, there was singing and always as "unto the Lord," the "Fount of every blessing." On the other hand, when things were not going well; when storms of sorrow, hardships and disappointments descend, there was singing. For example, on the night of Jesus' betrayal he gathered with his disciples for The Last Supper and among other things he had them sing together.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Paul and Silas, when in a most depressing and humiliating circumstance, that of being in prison with their feet fastened in stocks, had no defeatist attitude, for it is said of them that "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them!"<sup>2</sup> However, the Nicholas people, whatever the circumstance, whether a joyful convention at one of the churches, or whether at a wake, "sang as unto the Lord!"

### SERMONS IN NICHOLAS TREES

An interesting series of sermons could be written on unusual trees which I knew in Nicholas as well as on the famous, or infamous, trees mentioned in The Bible. In the Bible the trees ranged all the way from "The burning bush,"<sup>3</sup> which captured the attention of Moses at the time he received The Commandments, to the story of the fig tree that was destroyed because it produced no fruit.<sup>4</sup> There was the tree in whose boughs Absalom, Son of David, was entangled and held until he was put to death.<sup>5</sup> There was the tree whose boughs were used for the more worthy purpose of making it possible for Zacchaeus to meet The Master.<sup>6</sup> There were countless other interesting trees mentioned in the scriptures that had their counterpart in Nicholas, or, for that matter everywhere else. They are like persons with a personality peculiar unto themselves and convey a message. A few of them that made a lasting impression on me may be listed here.

There is a "root-walled" locust tree near the home of Mr. Alonzo Dorsey in the Wilderness. The main trunk and top of

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1. Mt. 26; 30

2. Ac. 16; 25

3. Ex. 3;

4. Mt. 21; 18, 19

5. II Sam. 18; 19

6. Lk. 19; 4

the tree lies down the hill where it fell during the tornado of 1935. A wall of its roots, like unsightly broken fingers reach upward as in despair. Below, and on the underneath side of the wall of useless roots, there are a few main roots yet attached to the soil. Through these, life is brought to the fallen tree.

While the main trunk of this tree lies prone on the ground, it continues to live. In the summer, its limbs, heavy with leaves, bend upward toward the sky and wave in the breeze as though in defiance of the storm that struck it down. I named the live roots by which it continues to live, FAITH, HOPE and LOVE. In the storms of life we may suffer many things and may, so to speak, "be blown down," many times, but if we are rooted in faith, hope and love, we will continue to live. The fallen tree that continues to live sometimes reminds me of the words of the Apostle Paul, "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; . . . struck down, but not destroyed."<sup>1</sup> — — —

Another Nicholas tree that made a good impression on me is located near the home of Mr. Willard Hughes at Dixon. It is a white walnut tree, commonly known as a "butter-nut" tree. This tree outdoes any tree of any kind that I have ever seen in the quantity of its production. The ground beneath the tree is literally covered with walnuts which it produces for whoever wants them. The remarkable thing about this tree is that it sits upon a rock with boulders of every size all around it. There is no visible evidence that the roots of this tree could reach the soil from which its life and strength must come. This is something of a mystery. How it could possibly live, much less be so outstanding in its production, is hard to understand.

This tree not only has meant much to me in that its fruit I go back to enjoy every few years, but also that it provided an illustration for sermons. It illustrates the fact that, although a person's life may be lived in rugged environment, it does not necessarily mean that his life has to be lived in vain! Of course, I know that somewhere through an unseen crevice in the huge

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1. II Co. 4: 8, 9

rock upon which the tree grows, the roots of the tree reaches into the soil. And somewhere, amid the rugged circumstances of life, a person's faith must be "rooted and grounded" in The Kind Heavenly Father if he is to live and do anything worthwhile. "Faith is the victory that overcomes the World."<sup>1</sup>

A third unusual tree in Nicholas that made an impression upon me is related in some ways to the legend of the dogwood, according, of course, to how one may regard it. It is a very large, dead cherry tree! Once it was beautiful, strong and filled with delicious cherries every summer. Now it is dead. Its ugly limbs, with peeling bark, looks ragged and forlorn against the background of an unsightly barn, about fifty yards from the well traveled road.

The interesting thing about this tree is that there is no possible evidence of why it should have died. The soil is rich beneath it. The sun and the rain descends upon it without obstruction. It is not too old. It should be at the height of its production. But it is dead! It has been suggested that it probably died from shame and disgrace, that from its once sturdy boughs a man hung by a rope until his life was gone. Like the dogwood from which the Cross of Christ had been made, according to the legend, the tree was so humiliated by this unhappy circumstance that it couldn't go on! It could not live with the memory of this unworthy act that had taken place in its boughs.

Perhaps this personification of a cherry tree is over-drawn. Whether trees have to live with their memory or not remains to be learned in the world that is to come, but this we know of a certainty, that people must live with memory! "No exile from himself can flee!" One should therefore be most careful what he allows himself to experience today, for one's life of tomorrow is now in the making! In a most real sense, today is always the day that we arranged for ourselves yesterday!

A fourth tree in Nicholas that made a lasting impression on me, although not to the "virtue side," is a tall beautiful hickory that stands in the church yard at Hickory Grove. Tall and

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1. I Jn. 5: 4



straight and with heavy foliage, it is most impressive. It is located at a vantage point there in the front of the church where it may out-shine all other trees in making its impression. When the wind blows, it proudly sways back and forth with the wind. The hickory-nuts that have grown upon its branches rattle down upon the ground, demanding attention. It is almost as though it says to everyone passing by, "Now, if you really want to see a beautiful tree that really amounts to something, have a look at me!"

However, this tree is really a fake, for all practical purposes. I have named it my "Pharisee Tree," because it seems to remind me of the Pharisee that came to the temple at the hour of prayer and who "Stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God I thank thee that I am not like other men . . .!'"<sup>1</sup> This tree, however, that makes such a wonderful impression to those who have not really studied about it, is actually in the way of the front approach to the church as people try to park, or to receive or unload passengers at the church. The hickory nuts that grow upon this tree are not good to eat. The tree is very much like a few laymen that I have known, who are always "out front" making a wonderful impression; swaying with the "breeze," however it seems to be blowing at the time, but when work is to be done which involves any sacrifice of time, energy or material means, they are not to be found anywhere until other loyal laymen have the situation under control. When the campaign is over, they will be on hand to join in the victory celebration, walking around all dressed up and talking loudly and impressing everyone that the great achievement, whatever it was, couldn't possibly have been accomplished except for their great influence and sacrificial help. If the work of the church were merely that of making a good impression, many could be found to carry on in a most admirable way — — —

Still another Nicholas tree that made a lasting impression on me, this one toward the "virtue side," is a beautiful maple that graces the front lawn of a home near Glad Tidings Church. I

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1. Luke 18; 11

have been acquainted with this tree for about thirty years, and I know about its struggle to live. In 1933, when it was a very young tree, it was run-over by a truck, bending it to the ground and destroying a part of its roots. However, it was lifted back to its normal upright position and supported by a wire that was attached to a stronger tree nearby. Later, when the roots of the injured tree had rearranged themselves and adopted to the new condition, the wire was removed and the once badly injured tree stood upright by its own power. It grew into a beautifully proportioned shade tree.

The story about this injured tree supported well a sermon I once was trying to preach on the matter of influence. Many times the influence of an older and more experienced follower of Christ may strengthen and inspire the less experienced who come upon the inevitable dissolutionments of life. One thinks of the influence of the veteran Apostle Peter upon the young man, Mark. Many New Testament scholars believe that the old Apostle had become the hero of Mark, and that on the night that Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane, that Mark was the young man who slipped out of his clothing and thus was able to break away from his captors and run away into the night; that he had followed Jesus and his disciples into the Garden desiring to be near his hero, the Apostle Peter. It is within range of possibility that had it not been for this influence of the old Apostle upon the young man that the story of what happened in the Garden of Gethsemane might never have become known to us.

### "GLAD TIDINGS"

#### A NEW DAY HAS DAWNED IN NICHOLAS

It wouldn't be appropriate to come to the end of my little volume without adding a few words about the most wonderful new day that has dawned in Nicholas. Many of the old familiar landmarks have vanished never to be seen again, erased by the rising tide of old Gauley River as it backs up from the Summersville Dam. I am told unofficially that there is ninety feet of water now over the spot where I used to cross that turbulent

river en route to the Wilderness. I can imagine myself standing, some day, on the magnificent new high bridge and of trying to explain this to my granddaughters, Paula, Sarah and Mary Catherine. I can just see their look of astonishment and of hearing them say: "Oh, Grandfather, you are 'putting us on!'" So many marvelous changes have resulted from the construction of the Summersville Dam. It has great influence on the whole County. My time in Nicholas may be said to have been the "Revival age!" The present age may be said to be the "Dam age!" No profanity intended, of course. However, it is a good age and we are thankful for it. No criticism is intended. — — —

The little Glad Tidings Methodist Church, located near the Summersville Dam, was the smallest of the nine churches I served on the Earl Charge. However, by virtue of its location, and the great changes that have taken place in the community, has literally become "The head of the corner!" Thousands who will visit the Dam and recreational area will see it there at the crossroads and many, it is hoped, will worship there.

In the beauty of its simplicity, the little edifice "preaches well!" For not only is it GLAD TIDINGS in name, it is Glad Tidings in the connotation of its appearance. Sitting there against its lovely background of pine trees, where in the springtime the rhododendron blooms, it has much to say to the passers-by!

When first I saw Glad Tidings in its new environment and position of prominence, presiding over the eastern approach to the Summersville Dam, I could not help thinking of a passage of scripture regarding the little village where Christ was born: "Thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art by no means least among the rulers of Judah. . ."<sup>1</sup> I had remembered Glad Tidings as the smallest of the churches on the charge, as I've said: The congregation consisted mainly of Mr. and Mrs. J. C. Ramsey; Mr. and Mrs. Garfield Ramsey; Mr. and Mrs. Joel Armentrout; Mr. and Mrs. McKindley Armentrout; Mr. and Mrs. Urban Dorsey; Mr. and Mrs. Clark O'Dell; Mr. and Mrs. Haymond Huffman; Mr. and Mrs. O. H. Huffman; Mrs. Almira and Edith Jones; Lawrence

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1. Mt. 2; 6



Brown, and Mr. and Mrs. M. F. Brown. The old "pump" organ that was in the church was played by Miss Linda King, whose membership, as I recall was at the Gilgal Church. — — —

As passing motorist view Glad Tidings Church today, they see a traffic sign: "KEEP RIGHT." This is the message also of the little church, sitting there in its humble beauty. "KEEP RIGHT!" for it is only in keeping morally right that there can be GLAD TIDINGS!

### "GOOD-BYE-NOW!"

The air was filled with shouts of farewell, as we drove away from our Last Quarterly Conference, on the Earl Charge in the fall of 1937. "Good by, now! Take care of yourselves! Don't forget to write," the people called after us as we drove away with a "lump" in the throat! The churches had been so good to us. Leaving them wasn't as easy as one might imagine!

Our district superintendent, Dr. D. Ralph Dunn, had arranged with our Bishop to give us a chance at College which we had been denied four years previously. We were sent to Adrian, a small mining town, a four-point Circuit, seven miles from Buckhannon and within commuting distance of West Virginia Wesleyan College, where a new chapter in the story of our Ministry was soon to begin. — — —

The four years in Nicholas had not seemed long. We had been bitterly disappointed in not having the opportunity for college in 1933 when we were sent to Nicholas, but "God works in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform," and soon there was "Created within us a right spirit!" The experiences gained in Nicholas were so valuable that we have always been glad that it had worked out in that way.

### MY TANK RUNNETH OVER!

"Three gallons, please," I said to the pretty young lady who was minding the store and gasoline pumps for her father one day at Fenwick.

"Only three?" she asked, with a pleasing smile on her face.

"Yes, that will be all this time," I replied, pretending to be interested in the passing traffic!

"Your car is well packed," she observed.

"Yes, we are moving today," I explained. "Going to Adrian down near Buckhannon; going to be a student preacher now for awhile."

"Everyone hates to see you leaving here," she said. — — —

Just at about that point in the conversation, I noticed that the meter on the gasoline pumps was nearing the amount I had asked for and was continuing to run. The pretty young lady was paying no attention to the meter, but was starting a conversation with Catherine, who was sitting in the car. As the meter passed the three gallon mark on the pump, I panicked! "Stop the pump!" I shouted, "I have no money!" But the pretty young lady didn't pay any attention to me. The pump kept running!

Soon the tank, which had been almost empty, was running over! When I offered the lady the money that I had, she very gracefully refused it. She only smiled and hoped that we would have a safe journey to our new pastorate and that if we were ever in that part of the country again that we would surely stop to visit them.

The kind lady was then Miss Florence Dorsey, daughter of Mr. J. I. Dorsey, whom we have mentioned elsewhere in these pages. She is now Mrs. Lawrence B. Holliday, of Rupert, West Virginia.

However, while it was the tank on our old car that was running over that day with gasoline which we so badly needed, it is our hearts that are running over now with gratitude as we remember this kindness.

## IN RETROSPECT

When the late Dr. L. S. Grose, district superintendent who brought about our appointment to the Earl Charge in 1933, was



asked about it, he said that he had not expected us to stay in Nicholas but for a very short time. It was, as the Man From Nicholas had said, "a rugged situation!" Dr. Grose explained that he had been unsuccessful in finding a minister to go there that year and that the charge was to be left unsupplied with a minister at conference. Then too he went on to explain that he had an additional problem on his hands of knowing just what to do with a twenty-one year old impatient local preacher. He said that he felt that he could solve both of these problems temporarily by appointing the local preacher to serve the unsupplied charge! However, when the appointment had worked out well for both the charge and the preacher, he was most happy and never ceased to speak of it in his travels about the conference.

Many times across the years since my pastorate in Nicholas, I have thought of the almost unbelievable circumstances surrounding my appointment and acceptance there. Among other considerations, I was only twenty-one years of age and, while I had served as a local minister five years, having been licensed at the age of sixteen, I had no experience as a pastor. I was uneducated, having only completed high school. I was frail and weak from a serious illness that had nearly cost my life and from which, according to my doctor, I had a miraculous recovery. I was wearing a patch over one eye, necessary from an infection. As many have since told me, I gave the impression of being only sixteen years of age. What a sorry prospect I must have been for pastor of nine churches in Nicholas County Mountains!

In the light of these circumstances, I can well understand the sentiment once expressed by the apostle Paul who said: "I am under obligation," or, as the King James version has it, "I am debtor!"<sup>1</sup> In a most real sense I feel that I owe my ministry to Nicholas County people. I feel that I am having a fruitful ministry, having received over fifteen hundred people into the membership of the Methodist Church. I feel that I have been able to make a definite contribution to the life of the church in all

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1. Romans 1; 16



my pastorates, and have loved them all. Perhaps the outstanding achievements of my ministry thus far has been the building of The Westmoreland Church in Huntington, which I served for ten years in two separate pastorates, and the dedication of the Glendale Methodist Church. However, if it had not been for the kindness of Nicholas County people in accepting me, thirty-five years ago, I would have had no ministry. If in any way this little volume has called attention to the greatness of those people, it has not been written in vain and the purpose of this writing has been fulfilled. There is a debt of gratitude which cannot be expressed, but in these humble pages we hope that it has at least been well acknowledged. — — —

In trying to word an appropriate summarizing statement with which to end this little volume, my mind turned to the Psalmist who expressed himself with memorable words on such varied occasions. I have tried to think of how he might summarize these pages. It seems to me that he might possibly say it in this way:

“Before the hard surface roads were built, or ever the High Bridge was placed over Gauley, or the Summersville Dam and Recreation Area were upon the drawing board, THY BLESSINGS WERE UPON US as we traveled the dusty roads of the Nicholas Mountains. SURELY THY GOODNESS AND MERCY THAT FOLLOWED US ALL THE DAYS OF THE EARL CHARGE, WILL DWELL IN THE MEMORY OF OUR MINDS AND IN THE LOVE OF OUR HEARTS FOREVER!”

